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INTRODUCTION

We sincerely hope that you will enjoy this first issue of *FANTASY BOOK*.

You will notice that, even though the number of pages in this number is limited, the per page wordage is high, at least twice—and in some cases, three times—that of magazines of a similiar nature. As our circulation increases, and paper becomes more available, we expect to achieve a more definite publication schedule, and to add many more pages. In fact, this plan will begin to operate immediately as we expect to have 48 pages in our next number—which will appear sometime between the fifteenth of December and the first of January.

A new feature making its initial appearance in the next issue is the **BOOK MARK**, where your comments and criticisms will be printed. We are very much interested in your suggestions—so let us hear from you.

And speaking of *Fantasy Book Number 2*: We are featuring another unusual tale by A. E. van Vogt, "The Ship of Darkness". The theme of this strange story was considered by some people as being too complex to be understood by magazine readers, but we believe that fantasy enthusiasts have a considerably higher I. Q. than the alleged 12 year old mentality of the average citizen...

We know that you will enjoy the short novelette by Basil Wells. This is a first-class adventure story that you won't lay down until finished... Then there's "Bargain with Beelzebub"—a whimsical short story with a definitely unusual twist... And "Star of the Undead"—an exciting interplanetary fantasy... And "Turnabout"—an interesting weird-fantasy by an English author... And others.

You'll note that most of the advertisements in this issue concern fantasy and science-fiction books. We certainly hope that you are a book lover—and will buy as many as possible. We'd hate to be driven to using advertisements about halitosis, B. O.—and all the other nauseating inventions of American ad writers.

Before we close this column we'd like to touch on the most important point: Our Policy.

This is a liberal magazine—with no "thought-police" guiding its destiny. Our main requirement for stories is that they should be different—capable of stimulating a new line of thought... A story may have almost any twist (witness the Hasse story in this issue), and if it's good... well, that's the very thing we want. We believe that you will welcome the chance to get your reading out of the rut of the commonplace... Naturally the fantasy, science-fiction or weird motif must be predominant.

May we point out, in closing, that you can obtain your copies of *Fantasy Book* on book paper by sending \$3.00 for the next twelve issues...

The Editors

FANTASY BOOK

VOL. 1

NUMBER 1

GARRET FORD, Editor

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The PEOPLE of the CRATER

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

BY ANDREW NORTH

"Send the Black Throne to dust; conquer the Black Ones, and bring the Daughter from the Caves of Darkness." These were the tasks Garin must perform to fulfill the prophecy of the Ancient Ones—and establish his own destiny in this hidden land!

CHAPTER ONE

Through the Blue Haze

SIX MONTHS AND THREE DAYS after the Peace of Shanghai was signed and the great War of 1965-1970 declared at an end by an exhausted world, a young man huddled on a park bench in New York, staring miserably at the gravel beneath his badly worn shoes. He had been trained to fill the pilot's seat in the control cabin of a fighting plane and for nothing else. The search for a niche in civilian life had cost him both health and ambition.

A newcomer dropped down on the other end of the bench. The flyer studied him bitterly. He had decent

shoes, a warm coat, and that air of satisfaction with the world which is the result of economic security. Although he was well into middle age, the man had a compact grace of movement and an air of alertness.

"Aren't you Captain Garin Featherstone?"

Startled, the flyer nodded dumbly.

From a plump billfold the man drew a clipping and waved it toward his seat mate. Two years before Captain Garin Featherstone of the United Democratic Forces had led a perilous bombing raid into the wilds of Siberia to wipe out the vast expeditionary army secretly gathering there. It had been a spectacular affair and had brought the survivors some fleeting fame.

"You're the sort of chap I've been looking for," the stranger folded the clipping again, "a flyer with courage,

initiative and brains. The man who led that raid is worth investing in."

"What's the proposition?" asked Featherstone wearily. He no longer believed in luck.

"I'm Gregory Farson," the other returned as if that should answer the question.

"The Antarctic man!"

"Just so. As you have probably heard, I was halted on the eve of my last expedition by the sudden spread of war to this country. Now I am preparing to sail south again."

"But I don't see——"

"How you can help me? Very simple, Captain Featherstone. I need pilots. Unfortunately the war has disposed of most of them. I'm lucky to contact one such as yourself——"

And it was as simple as that. But Garin didn't really believe that it was more than a dream until they touched the glacial shores of the polar continent some months later. As they brought ashore the three large planes he began to wonder at the driving motive behind Farson's vague plans.

When the supply ship sailed, not to return for a year, Farson called them together. Three of the company were pilots, all war veterans, and two were engineers who spent most of their waking hours engrossed in the maps Farson produced.

"Tomorrow," the leader glanced from face to face, "we start inland. Here——" On a map spread before him he indicated a line marked in purple.

"Ten years ago I was a member of the Verdane expedition. Once, when flying due south, our plane was caught by some freakish air current and drawn off its course. When we were totally off our map, we saw in the distance a thick bluish haze. It seemed to rise in a straight line from the ice plain to the sky. Unfortunately our fuel was low and we dared not risk a closer investigation. So we fought our way back to the base.

"Verdane, however, had little interest in our report and we did not investigate it. Three years ago that Kattack expedition hunting oil deposits by the order of the Dictator reported seeing the same haze. This time we are going to explore it!"

"Why," Garin asked curiously, "are you so eager to penetrate this haze?—I gather that's what we're to do——"

Farson hesitated before answering. "It has often been suggested that beneath the ice sheeting of this continent may be hidden mineral wealth. I believe that the haze is caused by some form of volcanic activity, and perhaps a break in the crust."

Garin frowned at the map. He wasn't so sure about that explanation, but Farson was paying the bills. The flyer shrugged away his uneasiness. Much could be forgiven a man who allowed one to eat regularly again.

Four days later they set out. Helmy, one of the engineers, Rawlson, a pilot, and Farson occupied the first plane. The other engineer and pilot were in the second and Garin, with the extra supplies, was alone in the third.

He was content to be alone as they took off across the blue-white waste. His ship, because of its load, was loggy, so he did not attempt to follow the other two into the higher lane. They were in communication by radio and Garin, as he snapped on his earphones, remembered something Farson had said that morning:

"The haze affects radio. On our trip near it the static was very bad. Almost," with a laugh, "like speech in some foreign tongue."

As they roared over the ice Garin wondered if it might

have been speech—from, perhaps, a secret enemy expedition, such as the Kattack one.

In his sealed cockpit he did not feel the bite of the frost and the ship rode smoothly. With a little sigh of content he settled back against the cushions, keeping to the course set by the planes ahead and above him.

Some five hours after they left the base, Garin caught sight of a dark shadow far ahead. At the same time Farson's voice chattered in his earphones.

"That's it. Set course straight ahead."

The shadow grew until it became a wall of purple-blue from earth to sky. The first plane was quite close to it, diving down into the vapor. Suddenly the ship rocked violently and swung earthward as if out of control. Then it straightened and turned back. Garin could hear Farson demanding to know what was the matter. But from the first plane there was no reply.

As Farson's plane kept going Garin throttled down. The actions of the first ship indicated trouble. What if that haze were a toxic gas?

"Close up, Featherstone!" barked Farson suddenly.

He obediently drew ahead until they flew wing to wing. The haze was just before them and now Garin could see movement in it, oily, impenetrable billows. The motors bit into it. There was clammy, foggy moisture on the windows.

Abruptly Garin sensed that he was no longer alone. Somewhere in the empty cabin behind him was another intelligence, a measuring power. He fought furiously against it—against the very idea of it. But, after a long, terrifying moment while it seemed to study him, it took control. His hands and feet still manipulated the ship, but it flew!

On the ship hurtled through the thickening mist. He lost sight of Farson's plane. And, though he was still fighting against the will which over-rode his, his struggles grew weaker. Then came the order to dive into the dark heart of the purple mists.

Down they whirled. Once, as the haze opened, Garin caught a glimpse of tortured gray rock seamed with yellow. Farson had been right: here the ice crust was broken.

Down and down. If his instruments were correct the plane was below sea level now. The haze thinned and was gone. Below spread a plain cloaked in vivid green. Here and there reared clumps of what might be trees. He saw, too, the waters of a yellow stream.

But there was something terrifyingly alien about that landscape. Even as he circled above it, Garin wrested to break the grip of the will that had brought him there. There came a crackle of sound in his earphones and at that moment the Presence withdrew.

The nose of the plane went up in obedience to his own desire. Frantically he climbed away from the green land. Again the haze absorbed him. He watched the moisture bead on the windows. Another hundred feet or so and he would be free of it—and that unbelievable world beneath.

Then, with an ominous sputter, the port engine conked out. The plane lurched and slipped into a dive. Down it whirled again into the steady light of the green land.

Trees came out of the ground, huge fern-like plants with crimson scaled trunks. Toward a clump of these the plane swooped.

Frantically Garin fought the controls. The ship steadied, the dive became a fast glide. He looked for an open space to land. Then he felt the landing gear scrape some surface. Directly ahead loomed one of the fern trees. The plane sped toward the long fronds. There came a ripping crash, the splintering of metal and wood. The scarlet cloud gathering before Garin's eyes turned black.

CHAPTER TWO

The Folk of Tav

GARIN returned to consciousness through a red mist of pain. He was pinned in the crumpled mass of metal which had once been the cabin. Through a rent in the wall close to his head thrust a long spike of green, shredded leaves still clinging to it. He lay and watched it, not daring to move lest the pain prove more than he could bear.

It was then that he heard the pattering sound outside. It seemed as if soft hands were pushing and pulling at the wreck. The tree branch shook and a portion of the cabin wall dropped away with a clang.

Garin turned his head slowly. Through the aperture was clambering a goblin figure.

It stood about five feet tall, and it walked upon its hind legs in human fashion, but the legs were short and stumpy, ending in feet with five toes of equal length. Slender, shapely arms possessed small hands with only four digits. The creature had a high, well-rounded forehead but no chin, the face being distinctly lizard-like in contour. The skin was a dull black, with a velvety surface. About its loins it wore a short kilt of metallic cloth, the garment being supported by a jeweled belt of exquisite workmanship.

For a long moment the apparition eyed Garin. And it was those golden eyes, fixed unwinkingly on his, which banished the flyer's fear. There was nothing but great pity in their depths.

The lizard-man stooped and brushed the sweat-dampened hair from Garin's forehead. Then he fingered the bonds of metal which held the flyer, as if estimating their strength. Having done so, he turned to the opening and apparently gave an order, returning again to squat by Garin.

Two more of his kind appeared to tear away the ruins of the cockpit. Though they were very careful, Garin fainted twice before they had freed him. He was placed on a litter swung between two clumsy beasts which might have been small elephants, except that they lacked trunks and possessed four tusks each.

They crossed the plain to the towering mouth of a huge cavern where the litter was taken up by four of the lizard-folk. The flyer lay staring up at the roof of the cavern. In the black stone had been carved fronds and flowers in bewildering profusion. Shining motes, giving off faint light, sifted through the air. At times as they advanced these gathered in clusters and the light grew brighter.

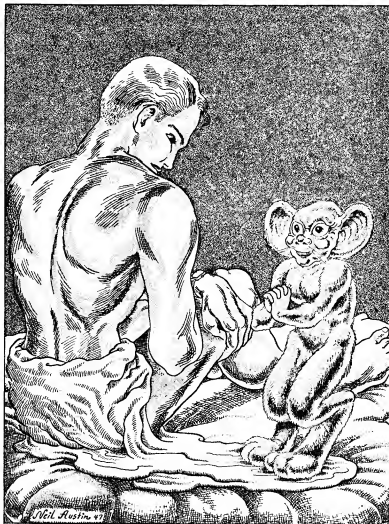
Midway down a long corridor the bearers halted while their leader pulled upon a knob on the wall. An oval door swung back and the party passed through.

They came into a round room, the walls of which had been fashioned of creamy quartz veined with violet. At the highest point in the ceiling a large globe of the motes hung, furnishing soft light below.

Two lizard-men, clad in long robes, conferred with the leader of the flyer's party before coming to stand over Garin. One of the robed ones shook his head at the sight of the flyer's twisted body and waved the litter on into an inner chamber.

Here the walls were dull blue and in the exact center was a long block of quartz. By this the litter was put down and the bearers disappeared. With sharp knives the robed men cut away furs and leather to expose Garin's broken body.

They lifted him to the quartz table and there made him fast with metal bonds. Then one of them went to the wall and pulled a gleaming rod. From the dome of the roof



shot an eerie blue light to beat upon Garin's helpless body. There followed a tingling through every muscle and joint, a prickling sensation in his skin, but soon his pain vanished as if it had never been.

The light flashed off and the three lizard-men gathered around him. He was wrapped in a soft robe and carried to another room. This, too, was circular, shaped like the half of a giant bubble. The floor sloped toward the center where there was a depression filled with cushions. There they laid Garin. At the top of the bubble, a pinkish cloud formed. He watched it drowsily until he fell asleep.

Something warm stirred against his bare shoulder. He opened his eyes, for a moment unable to remember where he was. Then there was a plucking at the robe twisted about him and he looked down.

If the lizard-folk had been goblin in their grotesqueness this visitor was elfin. It was about three feet high, its monkey-like body completely covered with silky white hair. The tiny hands were human in shape and hairless, but its feet were much like a cat's paws. From either side of the small round head branched large fan-shaped ears. The face was furred and boasted stiff cat whiskers on the upper lip. These *Anas*, as Garin learned later, were happy little creatures, each one choosing some mistress or master among the Folk, as this one had come to him. They were content to follow their big protector, speechless with delight at trifling gifts. Loyal and brave, they could do simple tasks or carry written messages for their chosen friend, and they remained with him until death. They were

neither beast nor human, but rumored to be the result of some experiment carried out eons ago by the Ancient Ones.

After patting Garin's shoulder the Ana touched the flyer's hair wonderingly, comparing the bronze lengths with its own white fur. Since the Folk were hairless, hair was a strange sight in the Caverns. With a contented purr, it rubbed its head against his hand.

With a sudden click a door in the wall opened. The Ana got to its feet and ran to greet the newcomers. The chieftain of the Folk, he who had first discovered Garin, entered, followed by several of his fellows.

The flyer sat up. Not only was the pain gone but he felt stronger and younger than he had for weary months. Exultingly he stretched wide his arms and grinned at the lizard-being who murmured happily in return.

Lizard-men busied themselves about Garin, girding on him the short kilt and jewel-set belt which were the only clothing of the Caverns. When they were finished, the chieftain took his hand and drew him to the door.

They traversed a hallway whose walls were carved and inlaid with glittering stones and metal work, coming, at last, into a huge cavern, the outer walls of which were hidden by shadows. On a dais stood three tall thrones and Garin was conducted to the foot of these.

The highest throne was of rose crystal. On its right was one of green jade, worn smooth by centuries of time. At the left was the third, carved of a single block of jet. The rose throne and that of jet were unoccupied, but in the seat of jade reposed one of the Folk. He was taller than his fellows, and in his eyes, as he stared at Garin, was wisdom—and a brooding sadness.

"It is well!" The words resounded in the flyer's head. "We have chosen wisely. This youth is fit to mate with the Daughter. But he will be tried, as fire tries metal. He must win the Daughter forth and strive with Kepta—"

A hissing murmur echoed through the hall. Garin guessed that hundreds of the Folk must be gathered there.

"Urg!" the being on the throne commanded. The chieftain moved a step toward the dais.

"Do you take this youth and instruct him. And then will I speak with him again. For—" sadness colored the words now—"We would have the rose throne filled again and the black one blasted into dust. Time moves swiftly."

The Chieftain led a wondering Garin away.

CHAPTER THREE

Garin Hears of the Black Ones

URG BROUGHT the flyer into one of the bubble-shaped rooms which contained a low, cushioned bench facing a metal screen—and here they seated themselves.

What followed was a language lesson. On the screen appeared objects which Urg would name, to have his sibilant uttering repeated by Garin. As the American later learned, the ray treatment he had undergone had quickened his mental powers, and in an incredibly short time he had a working vocabulary.

Judging by the pictures the lizard folk were the rulers of the crater world, although there was other forms of life there. The elephant-like *Tand* was a beast of burden, the squirrel-like *Eron* lived underground and carried on a crude agriculture in small clearings, coming shyly twice a year to exchange grain for a liquid rubber produced by the Folk.

Then there was the *Gibi*, a monstrous bee, also friendly to the lizard people. It supplied the cavern dwellers with wax, and in return the Folk gave the *Gibi* colonies shelter during the unhealthful times of the Great Mists.

Highly civilized were the Folk. They did no work by hand, except the finer kinds of jewel setting and carving. Machines wove their metal cloth, machines prepared their food, harvested their fields, hollowed out new dwellings.

Freely from manual labor they had turned to acquiring knowledge. Urg projected on the screen pictures of vast laboratories and great libraries of scientific lore. But all they knew in the beginning, they had learned from the Ancient Ones, a race unlike themselves, which had preceded them in sovereignty over *Tav*. Even the Folk themselves were the result of constant forced evolution and experimentation carried on by these Ancient Ones.

All this wisdom was guarded most carefully, but against what or whom, Urg could not tell, although he insisted that the danger was very real. There was something within the blue wall of the crater which disputed the Folk's rule.

As Garin tried to probe further a gong sounded. Urg arose.

"It is the hour of eating," he announced. "Let us go."

They came to a large room where a heavy table of white stone stretched along three walls, benches before it. Urg seated himself and pressed a knob on the table, motioning Garin to do likewise. The wall facing them opened and two trays slid out. There was a platter of hot meat covered with rich sauce, a stone bowl of grain porridge and a cluster of fruit, still fastened to a leafy branch. This the Ana eyed so wistfully that Garin gave it to the creature.

The Folk ate silently and arose quietly when they had finished, their trays vanishing back through the wall. Garin noticed only males in the room and recalled that he had, as yet, seen no females among the Folk. He ventured a question.

Urg chuckled. "So, you think there are no women in the Caverns? Well, we shall go to the Hall of Women that you may see."

To the Hall of Women they went. It was breath-taking in its richness, stones worth a nation's ransom sparkling from its domed roof and painted walls. Here were the matrons and maidens of the Folk, their black forms veiled in robes of silver net, each cross strand of which was set with a tiny gem, so that they appeared to be wrapped in glittering scales.

There were not many of them—a hundred perhaps. And a few led by the hand smaller editions of themselves who stared at Garin with round yellow eyes and chewed black finger tips shyly.

The women were intrusted with the finest jewel work, and with pride they showed the stranger their handiwork. At the far end of the hall was a wondrous thing in the making. One of the silver nets which were the foundations of their robes was fastened there and three of the women were putting small rose jewels into each microscopic setting. Here and there they had varied the pattern with tiny emeralds or flaming opals so that the finished portion was a rainbow.

One of the workmen smoothed the robe and glanced up at Garin, a gentle teasing in her voice as she explained: "This is for the Daughter when she comes to her throne."

The Daughter! What had the Lord of the Folk said? "This youth is fit to mate with the Daughter." But Urg had said that the Ancient Ones had gone from *Tav*.

"Who is the Daughter?" he demanded.

"Thrala of the Light."

"Where is she?"

The woman shivered and there was fear in her eyes. "Thrala lies in the Caves of Darkness."

"The Caves of Darkness!" Did she mean Thrala was dead? Was he, Garin Featherstone, to be the victim of

some rite of sacrifice which was designed to unite him with the dead?

Urg touched his arm. "Not so. Thrala has not yet entered the Place of Ancesters."

"You know my thoughts?"

Urg laughed. "Thoughts are easy to read. Thrala lives. Sera served the Daughter as handmaiden while she was yet among us. Sera, do you show us Thrala as she was."

The woman crossed to a wall where there was a mirror as if as Urg had used for his language lesson. She gazed into it and then beckoned the flyer to stand beside her.

The mirror misted and then he was looking, as if through a window, into a room with walls and ceiling of rose quartz. On the floor were thick rugs of silver rose. And a great heap of cushions made a low couch in the center.

"The inner chamber of the Daughter," Sera announced.

A circular panel in the wall opened and a woman slipped through. She was very young, little more than a girl. There were happy curves in her full crimson lips, joyous lights in her violet eyes.

She was human of shape, but her beauty was unearthly. Her skin was pearl white and other colors seemed to play faintly upon it, so that it reminded Garin of mother-of-pearl with its lights and shadows. The hair, which veiled her as a cloud, was blue-black and reached below her knees. She was robed in the silver net of the Folk and there was a heavy girdle of rose shaded jewels about her slender waist.

"That was Thrala before the Black Ones took her," said Sera.

Garin uttered a cry of disappointment as the picture vanished. Urg laughed.

"What care you for shadows when the Daughter herself waits for you? You have but to bring her from the Caves of Darkness—"

"Where are these Caves——" Garin's question was interrupted by the pealing of the Cavern gong. Sera cried out: "The Black Ones!"

Urg shrugged. "When they spared not the Ancient Ones how could we hope to escape? Come, we must go to the Hall of Thrones."

Before the jade throne of the Lord of the Folk stood a small group of the lizard-men beside two litters. As Garin entered the Lord spoke.

"Let the outlander come hither that he may see the work of the Black Ones."

Garin advanced unwillingly, coming to stand by those struggling things which gasped their message between moans and screams of agony. They were men of the Folk but their black skins were green with rot.

The Lord leaned forward on his throne. "It is well," he said. "You may depart."

As if obeying his command, the tortured things let go of the life to which they had clung and were still.

"Look upon the work of the Black Ones," the ruler said to Garin. "Jiv and Betv were captured while on a mission to the Gibi of the Cliff. It seems that the Black Ones needed material for their laboratories. They seek even to give the Daughter to their workers of horror!"

A terrible cry of hatred arose from the hall, and Garin's jaw set. To give that fair vision he had just seen to such a death as this——!

"Jiv and Betv were imprisoned close to the Daughter and they heard the threats of Kepta. Our brothers, stricken with foul disease, were sent forth to carry the plague to us, but they swam through the pool of boiling mud. They have died, but the evil died with them. And I think that while we breed such as they, the Black Ones shall not rest

easy. Listen now, outlander, to the story of the Black Ones and the Caves of Darkness, of how the Ancient Ones brought the Folk up from the slime of a long dried sea and made them great, and of how the Ancient Ones at last went down to their destruction."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Defeat of the Ancient Ones

"In the days before the lands of the outer world were born of the sea, before even the Land of the Sun (Mu) and the Land of the Sea (Atlantis) arose from molten rock and sand, there was land here in the far south. A sere land of rock plains, and swamps where slimy life mated, lived and died.

"Then came the Ancient Ones from beyond the stars. Their race was already older than this earth. Their wise men had watched its birth—rending from the sun. And when their world perished, taking most of their blood into nothingness, a handful fled hither.

"But when they climbed from their space ship it was into hell. For they had gained, in place of their loved home, bare rock and stinking slime.

"They blasted out this Tav and entered into it with the treasures of their flying ships and also certain living creatures captured in the swamps. From these, they produced the Folk, the Gibi, the Tand, and the land-tending Eron.

"Among these, the Folk were eager for wisdom and climbed high. But still the learning of the Ancient Ones remained beyond their grasp.

"During the eons the Ancient Ones dwelt within their protecting wall of haze the outer world changed. Cold came to the north and south; the Land of Sun and the Land of Sea arose to bear the foot of true man. On their mirrors of seeing the Ancient Ones watched man-life spread across the world. They had the power of prolonging life, but still the race was dying. From without must come new blood. So certain men were summoned from the Land of the Sun. Then the race flourished for a space.

"The Ancient Ones decided to leave Tav for the outer world. But the sea swallowed the Land of Sun. Again in the time of the Land of Sea the stock within Tav was replenished and the Ancient Ones prepared for exodus; again the sea cheated them.

"Those men left in the outer world reverted to savagery. Since the Ancient Ones would not mingle their blood with that of almost beasts, they built the haze wall stronger and remained. But a handful of them were attracted by the forbidden, and secretly they summoned the beast men. Of that monstrous mating came the Black Ones. They live but for the evil they may do, and the power which they acquired is debased and used to forward cruelty.

"At first their sin was not discovered. When it was, the others would have slain the offspring but for the law which forbids them to kill. They must use their power for good or it departs from them. So they drove the Black Ones to the southern end of Tav and gave them the Caves of Darkness. Never were the Black Ones to come north of the River of Gold—nor were the Ancient Ones to go south of it.

"For perhaps two thousand years the Black Ones kept the law. But they worked, building powers of destruction. While matters rested thus, the Ancient Ones searched the world, seeking men by whom they could renew the race. Once there came men from an island far to the north. Six lived to penetrate the mists and take wives among the Daughters. Again, they called the yellow-haired men of another breed, great sea rovers.

"But the Black Ones called too. As the Ancient Ones searched for the best, the Black Ones brought in great workers of evil. And, at last, they succeeded in shutting off the channels of sending thought so that the Ancient Ones could call no more.

"Then did the Black Ones cross the River of Gold and enter the land of the Ancient Ones. Thrán, Dweller in the Light and Lord of the Caverns, summoned the Folk to him.

"There will come one to aid you," he told us. "Try the summoning again after the Black Ones have seemed to win. Thrála, daughter of the Light, will not enter into the room of Pleasant Death with the rest of the women, but will give herself into the hands of the Black Ones, that they may think themselves truly victorious. You of the Folk withdraw into the Place of Reptiles until the Black Ones are gone. Nor will all the Ancient Ones perish—more will be saved, but the manner of their preservation I dare not tell. When the sun-haired youth comes from the outer world, send him into the Caves of Darkness to rescue Thrála and put an end to evil.

"And then the Lady Thrála arose and said softly. 'As the Lord Thrán has said, so let it be. I shall deliver myself into the hands of the Black Ones that their doom may come upon them.'

"Lord Thrán smiled upon her as he said: 'So will happiness be your portion. After the Great Mists, does not light come again?'

"The women of the Ancient Ones then took their leave and passed into the place of pleasant death while the men made ready for battle with the Black Ones. For three days they fought, but a new weapon of the Black Ones won the day, and the chief of the Black Ones set up this throne of jet as proof of his power. Since, however, the Black Ones were not happy in the Caverns, longing for the darkness of their caves, they soon withdrew and we, the Folk, came forth again.

"But now the time has come when the dark ones will sacrifice the Daughter to their evil. If you can win her free, outlander, they shall perish as if they had not been."

"What of the Ancient Ones?" asked Garin—"those others Thrán said would be saved?"

"Of those we know nothing save that when we bore the bodies of the fallen to the Place of Ancestors there were some missing. That you may see the truth of this story, Urg will take you to the gallery above the Room of Pleasant Death and you may look upon those who sleep there."

Urg guiding, Garin climbed a steep ramp leading from the Hall of Thrones. This led to a narrow balcony, one side of which was clear crystal. Urg pointed down.

They were above a long room whose walls were tinted jade green. On the polished floor were scattered piles of cushions. Each was occupied by a sleeping woman and several of these clasped a child in their arms. Their long hair rippled to the floor, their curved lashes made dark shadows on pale faces.

"But they are sleeping!" protested Garin.

Urg shook his head. "It is the sleep of death. Twice each ten hours vapours rise from the floor. Those breathing them do not wake again, and if they are undisturbed they will lie thus for a thousand years. Look there—"

He pointed to the closed double doors of the room. There lay the first men of the Ancient Ones Garin had seen. They, too, seemed but asleep, their handsome heads pillowed on their arms.

"Thrán ordered those who remained after the last battle in the Hall of Thrones to enter the Room of Pleasant Death that the Black Ones might not torture them for their beastly pleasures. Thrán himself remained behind to close

the door, and so died."

There were no aged among the sleepers. None of the men seemed to count more than thirty years and many of them appeared younger. Garin remarked upon this.

"The Ancient Ones appeared thus until the day of their death; though many lived twice a hundred years. The light rays kept them so. Even we of the Folk can hold back age. But come now, our Lord Trar would speak with you again."

CHAPTER FIVE

Into the Caves of Darkness

Again Garin stood before the jade throne of Trar and heard the stirring of the multitude of the Folk in the shadows. Trar was turning a small rod of glittering, greenish metal around in his soft hands.

"Listen well, outlander," he began, "for little time remains to us. Within seven days the Great Mists will be upon us. Then no living thing may venture forth from shelter and escape death. And before that time Thrála must be out of the Caves. This rod will be your weapon; the Black Ones have not its secret. Watch."

Two of the Folk dragged an ingot of metal before him. He touched it with the rod. Great flakes of rust appeared, to spread across the entire surface. It crumpled away and one of the Folk trod upon the pile of dust where it had been.

"Thrála lies in the heart of the Caves but Kepta's men have grown careless with the years. Enter boldly and trust to fortune. They know nothing of your coming or of Thrán's words concerning you."

Urg stood forward and held out his hands in appeal.

"What would you, Urg?"

"Lord, I would go with the outlander. He knows nothing of the Forest of the Morgels or of the Pool of Mud. It is easy to go astray in the woodland—"

Trar shook his head. "That may not be. He must go alone, even as Thrán said."

The Ana, which had followed in Garin's shadow all day, whistled shrilly and stood on tiptoe to tug at his hand. Trar smiled. "That one may go, its eyes may serve you well. Urg will guide you to the outer portal of the Place of Ancestors and set you upon the road to the Caves. Farewell, outlander, and may the spirits of the Ancient Ones be with you."

Garin bowed to the ruler of the Folk and turned to follow Urg. Near the door stood a small group of women. Sera pressed forward from them, holding out a small bag.

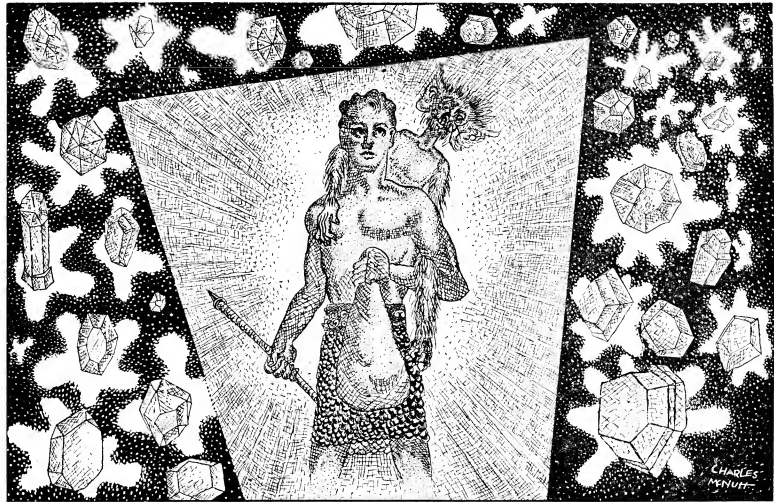
"Outlander," she said hurriedly, "when you look upon the Daughter speak to her of Sera, for I have awaited her many years."

He smiled. "That I will."

"If you remember, outlander. I am a great lady among the Folk and have my share of suitors, yet I think I could envy the Daughter. Nay, I shall not explain that," she laughed mockingly. "You will understand in due time. Here is a packet of food. Now go swiftly that we may have you among us again before the Mists."

So a woman's farewell sped them on their way. Urg chose a ramp which led downward. At its foot was a niche in the rock, above which a rose light burned dimly. Urg reached within the hollow and drew out a pair of high buskins which he aided Garin to lace on. They were a good fit, having been fashioned for a man of the Ancient Ones.

The passage before them was narrow and crooked. There was a thick carpet of dust underfoot, patterned by



*With the Ana perched on his shoulder and the green rod of destruction in his band, Garin strode into the gloom of Tav—
piledged to bring the Daughter out of the Caves of Darkness ...*

the prints of the Folk. They rounded a corner and a tall door loomed out of the gloom. Urg pressed the surface, there was a click and the stone rolled back.

"This is the Place of Ancestors," he announced as he stepped within.

They were at the end of a colossal hall whose domed roof disappeared into shadows. Thick pillars of gleaming crystal divided it into aisles all leading inward to a raised dais of oval shape. Filling the aisles were couches and each soft nest held its sleeper. Near to the door lay the men and women of the Folk, but closer to the dais were the Ancient Ones. Here and there a couch bore a double burden, upon the shoulder of a man was pillowed the drooping head of a woman. Urg stopped beside such a one.

"See, outlander, here was one who was called from your world. Marena of the House of Light looked with favor upon him and their days of happiness were many."

The man on the couch had red-gold hair and on his upper arm was a heavy band of gold whose mate Garin had once seen in a museum. A son of pre-Norman Ireland. Urg traced with a crooked finger the archaic lettering carved upon the stone base of the couch.

"Lovers in the Light sleep sweetly. The Light returns on the appointed day."

"Who lies there?" Garin motioned to the dais.

"The first Ancient Ones. Come, look upon those who made this Tav."

On the dais the couches were arranged in two rows and between them, in the center, was a single couch raised above the others. Fifty men and women lay as if but resting for the hour, smiles on their peaceful faces but weary shadows beneath their eyes. There was an un-human

quality about them which was lacking in their descendants.

Urg advanced to the high couch and beckoned Garin to join him. A man and a woman lay there, the woman's head upon the man's breast. There was that in their faces which made Garin turn away. He felt as if he had intruded roughly where no man should go.

"Here lies Thran, Son of Light, first Lord of the Caverns, and his lady Thrala, Dweller in the Light. So have they lain a thousand thousand years, and so will they lie until this planet rots to dust beneath them. They led the Folk out of the slime and made Tav. Such as they we shall never see again."

They passed silently down the aisles of the dead. Once Garin caught sight of another fair haired man, perhaps another outlander, since the Ancient Ones were all dark of hair. Urg paused once more before they left the hall. He stood by the couch of a man, wrapped in a long robe, whose face was ravaged with marks of agony.

Urg spoke a single name: "Thran."

So this was the last lord of the Caverns. Garin leaned closer to study the dead face but Urg seemed to have lost his patience. He hurried his charge on to a panel door.

"This is the southern portal of the Caverns," he explained. "Trust to the Ana to guide you and beware of the boiling mud. Should the morgels scent you, kill quickly, they are the servants of the Black Ones. May fortune favor you, outlander."

The door was open and Garin looked out upon Tav. The soft blue light was as strong as it had been when he had first seen it. With the Ana perched on his shoulder, the green rod and the bag of food in his hands, he stepped out onto the moss sod.

Urg raised his hand in salute and the door clicked into place. Garin stood alone, pledged to bring the Daughter out of the Caves of Darkness.

There is no night or day in Tav since the blue light is steady. But the Folk divide their time by artificial means. However Garin, being newly come from the rays of healing, felt no fatigue. As he hesitated the Ana chattered and pointed confidently ahead.

Before them was a dense wood of fern trees. It was quiet in the forest as Garin made his way into its gloom and for the first time he noted a peculiarity of Tav. There were no birds.

The portion of the woodland they had to traverse was but a spur of the forest to the west. After an hour of travel they came out upon the bank of a sluggish river. The turbid waters of the stream were a dull saffron color. This, thought Garin, must be the River of Gull, the boundary of the lands of the Black Ones.

He rounded a bend to come upon a bridge, so old that time itself had worn its stone angles into curves. The bridge gave on a wide plain where tall grass grew sere and yellow. To the left was a hissing and bubbling, and a huge wave of boiling mud arose in the air. Garin choked in a wind, thick with chemicals, which blew from it. He smelled and tasted the sulphur-tainted air all across the plain.

And he was glad enough to plunge into a small fern grove which half-concealed a spring. There he bathed his head and arms while the Ana pulled open Sera's food bag.

Together they ate the cakes of grain and the dried fruit. When they were done the Ana tugged at Garin's hand and pointed on.

Cautiously Garin wormed his way through the thick underbrush until, at last, he looked out into a clearing and at its edge the entrance of the Black Ones' Caves. Two tall pillars, carved into the likeness of foul monsters guarded a rough edged hole. A fine greenish mist whirled and danced in its mouth.

The flyer studied the entrance. There was no life to be seen. He gripped the destroying rod and inched forward. Before the green mist he braced himself and then stepped within.

CHAPTER SIX

Kepta's Second Prisoner

The green mist enveloped Garin. He drew into his lungs hot moist air faintly tinged with a scent of sickly sweetness as from some hidden corruption. Green motes in the air gave forth little light and seemed to cling to the intruder.

With the Ana pattering before him, the American started down a steep ramp, the soft soles of his buskins making no sound. At regular intervals along the wall, niches held small statues. And about each perverted figure was a crown of green motes.

The Ana stopped, its large ears outspread as if to catch the faintest murmur of sound. From somewhere under the earth came the howls of a maddened dog. The Ana shivered, creeping closer to Garin.

Down led the ramp, growing narrower and steeper. And louder sounded the insane, coughing howls of the dog. Then the passage was abruptly barred by a grill of black stone. Garin peered through its bars at a flight of stairs leading down into a pit. From the pit arose snarling laughter.

Padding back and forth were things which might have been conceived by demons. They were sleek, rat-like creatures, hairless, and large as ponies. Red saliva dripped

from the corners of their sharp jaws. But in the eyes, which they raised now and then toward the grill, there was intelligence. These were the morgels, watch dogs and slaves of the Black Ones.

From a second pair of stairs directly across the pit arose a moaning call. A door opened and two men came down the steps. The morgels surged forward, but fell back when whips were cracked over their heads.

The masters of the morgels were human in appearance. Black lion cloths were twisted about them and long, wing shaped cloaks hung from their shoulders. On their heads, completely masking their hair, were cloth caps which bore ragged crests not unlike cockscombs. As far as Garin could see they were unarmed except for their whips.

A second party was coming down the steps. Between two of the Black Ones struggled a prisoner. He made a desperate and hopeless fight of it, but they dragged him to the edge of the pit before they halted. The morgels, intent upon their promised prey, crouched before them.

Five steps above were two figures to whom the guards looked for instructions. One was a man of their race, of slender, handsome body and evil, beautiful face. His hand lay possessively upon the arm of his companion.

It was Thrala who stood beside him, her head proudly erect. The laughter curves were gone from her lips; there was only sorrow and resignation to be read there now. But her spirit burned like a white flame in her eyes.

"Look!" Her warder ordered. "Does not Kepta keep his promises? Shall we give Dandtan into the jaws of our slaves, or will you unsay certain words of yours, Lady Thrala?"

The prisoner answered for her. "Kepta, son of vileness, Thrala is not for you. Remember, beloved one," he spoke to the Daughter, "the day of deliverance is at hand—"

Garin felt a sudden emptiness. The prisoner had called Thrala "beloved" with the ease of one who had the right.

"I await Thrala's answer," Kepta returned evenly. And her answer he got.

"Beast among beasts, you may send Dandtan to his death, you may heap all manner of insult and evil upon me, but still I say the Daughter is not for your touch. Rather will I cut the line of life with my own hands, taking upon me the punishment of the Elder Ones. To Dandtan," she smiled down upon the prisoner, "I say farewell. We shall meet again beyond the Curtain of Time." She held out her hands to him.

"Thrala, dear one—!" One of his guards slapped a hand over the prisoner's mouth putting an end to his words.

But now Thrala was looking beyond him, straight at the grill which sheltered Garin. Kepta pulled at her arm to gain her attention. "Watch! Thus do my enemies die. To the pit with him!"

The guards twisted their prisoner around and the morgels crept closer, their eyes fixed upon that young, writhing body. Garin knew that he must take a hand in the game. The Ana was tugging him to the right and there was an open archway leading to a balcony running around the side of the pit.

Those below were too entranced by the coming sport to notice the invader. But Thrala glanced up and Garin thought that she sighted him. Something in her attitude attracted Kepta, he too looked up. For a moment he stared in stark amazement, and then he thrust the Daughter through the door behind him.

"Ho, outlander! Welcome to the Caves. So the Folk have meddled—"

"Greeting, Kepta," Garin hardly knew whence came the words which fell so easily from his tongue. "I have come

as was promised, to remain until the Black Throne is no more."

"Not even the morgels boast before their prey lies limp in their jaws," flashed Kepta. "What manner of beast are you?"

"A clean beast, Kepta, which you are not. Bid your two-legged morgels loose the youth, lest I grow impatient." The flyer swung the green rod into view.

Kepta's eyes narrowed but his smile did not fade. "I have heard of old that the Ancient Ones do not destroy—"

"As an outlander I am not bound by their limits," returned Garin, "as you will learn if you do not call off your

The master of the Caves laughed. "You are as the Tand, stinking pack."
 a fool without a brain. Never shall you see the Caverns again—"

"You shall own me master yet, Kepta."

The Black Chief seemed to consider. Then he waved to his men. "Release him," he ordered. "Outlander, you are braver than I thought. We might bargain—"

"Thrala goes forth from the Caves and the black throne is dust, those are the terms of the Caverns."

"And if we do not accept?"

"Then Thrala goes forth, the throne is dust and Tav shall have a day of judging such as it has never seen before."

"You challenge me?"

Again words, which seemed to Garin to have their origin elsewhere, came to him. "As in Yu-lac, I shall take—"

Before Kepta could reply there was trouble in the pit. Dandtan, freed by his guards, was crossing the floor in running leaps. Garin threw himself belly down on the balcony and dropped the jeweled strap of his belt over the lip.

A moment later it snapped taut and he stiffened to an upward pull. Already Dandtan's heels were above the snapping jaws of a morgel. The flyer caught the youth around the shoulders and heaved. They rolled together against the wall.

"They are gone! All of them!" Dandtan cried, as he regained his feet. He was right; the morgels howled below, but Kepta and his men had vanished.

"Thrala!" Garin exclaimed.

Dandtan nodded. "They have taken her back to the cells. They believe her safe there."

"Then they think wrong," Garin stooped to pick up the green rod. His companion laughed.

"We'd best start before they get prepared for us."

Garin picked up the Ana. "Which way?"

Dandtan showed him a passage leading from behind the other door. Then he dodged into a side chamber to return with two of the wing cloaks and cloth hoods, so that they might pass as Black Ones.

They went by the mouths of three side tunnels, all deserted. None disputed their going. All the Black Ones had withdrawn from this part of the Caves.

Dandtan sniffed uneasily. "All is not well. I fear a trap."

"While we can pass, let us."

The passage curved to the right and they came into an oval room. Again Dandtan shook his head but ventured no protest. Instead he flung open a door and hurried down a short hall.

It seemed to Garin that there were strange rustlings and squeakings in the dark corners. Then Dandtan stopped so short that the flyer ran into him.

"Here is the guard room—and it is empty!"

Garin looked over his shoulder into a large room. Racks of strange weapons hung on the walls and the sleeping pallets of the guards were stacked evenly, but the men were nowhere to be seen.

They crossed the room and passed beneath an archway. "Even the bars are not down," observed Dandtan. He pointed overhead. There hung a portcullis of stone. Garin studied it apprehensively. But Dandtan drew him on into a narrow corridor where were barred doors.

"The cells," he explained, and withdrew a bar across one door. The portal swung back and they pushed within.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Kepta's Trap

Thrala arose to face them. Forgetting the disguise he wore, Garin drew back, chilled by her icy demeanor. But Dandtan sprang forward and caught her in his arms. She struggled madly until she saw the face beneath her captor's hood, and then she gave a cry of delight and her arms were about his neck.

"Dandtan!"

He smiled. "Even so. But it is the outlander's doing." She came to the American, studying his face. "Outlander? So cold a name is not for you, when you have served us so." She offered him her hands and he raised them to his lips.

"And how are you named?"

Dandtan laughed. "Thus the eternal curiosity of women!"

"Garin."

"Garin," she repeated. "How like—" A faint rose glowed beneath her pearl flesh.

Dandtan's hand fell lightly upon his rescuer's shoulder. "Indeed he is like him. From this day let him bear that other's name. Garan, son of light."

"Why not?" she returned calmly. "After all—"

"The reward which might have been Garan's may be his? Tell him the story of his namesake when we are again in the Caverns—"

Dandtan was interrupted by a frightened squeak from the Ana. Then came a mocking voice.

"So the pray has entered the trap of its own will. How many hunters may boast the same?"

Kepta leaned against the door, the light of vicious mischief dancing in his eyes. Garin dropped his cloak to the floor, but Dandtan must have read what was in the flyer's mind, for he caught him by the arm.

"On your life, touch him not!"

So you have learned that much wisdom while you have dwelt among us, Dandtan? Would that Thrala had done the same. But fair women find me weak." He eyed her proud body in a way that would have sent Garin at his throat had Dandtan not held him. "So shall Thrala have a second chance. How would you like to see these men in the Room of Instruments, Lady?"

"I do not fear you," she returned. "Thran once made a prophecy, and he never spoke idly. We shall win free—"

"That will be as fate would have it. Meanwhile, I leave you to each other." He whipped around the door and slammed it behind him. They heard the grating of the bar he slid into place. Then his footsteps died away.

"There goes evil," murmured Thrala softly. "Perhaps it would have been better if Garin had killed him as he thought to do. We must get away . . ."

Garin drew the rod from his belt. The green light motes gathered and clung about its polished length.

"Touch not the door," Thrala advised; "only its hinges."

Beneath the tip of the rod the stone became spongy and flaked away. Dandtan and the flyer caught the door and eased it to the floor. With one quick movement Thrala caught up Garin's cloak and swirled it about her, hiding the glitter of her gem encrusted robe.

There was a curious cold lifelessness about the air of the corridor, the light-bearing motes vanishing as if blown out.

"Hurry!" the Daughter urged. "Kepta is withdrawing the living light, so that we will have to wander in the dark."

When they reached the end of the hall the light was quite gone, and Garin bruised his hands against the stone portullis which had been lowered. From somewhere on the other side of the barrier came rippling laughter.

"Oh, outlander," called Kepta mockingly, "you will get through easily enough when you remember your weapon. But the dark you can not conquer so easily, nor that which runs the halls."

Garin was already busy with the rod. Within five minutes their way was clear again. But Thrala stopped them when they would have gone through. "Kepta has loosed the hunters."

"The hunters?"

"The morgels and—others," explained Dandtan. The Black Ones have withdrawn and only death comes this way. And the morgels see in the dark . . ."

"So does the Ana."

"Well thought of," agreed the son of the Ancient Ones. "It will lead us out."

As if in answer, there came a tug at Garin's belt. Reaching back, he caught Thrala's hand and knew that she had taken Dandtan's. So linked they crossed the guard room. Then the Ana paused for a long time, as if listening. There was nothing to see but the darkness which hung about them like the smothering folds of a curtain.

"Something follows us," whispered Dandtan.

"Nothing to fear," stated Thrala. "It dare not attack. It is, I think, of Kepta's fashioning. And that which has not true life dreads death above all things. It is going—"

There came sounds of something crawling slowly away. "Kepta will not try that again," continued the Daughter, disdainfully. "He knew that his monstrosities would not attack. Only in the light are they to be dreaded—and then only because of the horror of their forms."

Again the Ana tugged at its master's belt. They shuffled into the narrow passage beyond. But there remained the sense of things about them in the dark, things which Thrala continued to insist were harmless and yet which filled Garin with loathing.

Then they entered the far corridor into which led the three halls and which ended in the morgel pit. Here, Garin believed, was the greatest danger from the morgels.

The Ana stopped short, dropping back against Garin's thigh. In the blackness appeared two yellow disks, sparks of saffron in their depths. Garin thrust the rod into Thrala's hands.

"What do you?" she demanded.

"I'm going to clear the way. It's too dark to use the rod against moving creatures . . ." He flung the words over his shoulder as he moved toward the unwinking eyes.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Escape from the Caves

Keeping his eyes upon those soulless yellow disks, Garin snatched off his hood, wadding it into a ball. Then he sprang. His fingers slipped on smooth hide, sharp fangs ripped his forearm, blunt nails scrapped his ribs. A foul breath puffed into his face and warm slaver trickled down his neck and chest. But his plan succeeded.

The cap was wedged into the morgel's throat and the beast was slowly choking. Blood dripped from the flyer's torn flesh, but he held on grimly until he saw the light fade from those yellow eyes. The dying morgel made a last

mad plunge for freedom, dragging his attacker along the rock floor. Then Garin felt the heaving body rest limply against his own. He staggered against the wall, panting.

"Garin!" cried Thrala. Her questing hand touched his shoulder and crept to his face. "It is well with you?"

"Yes," he panted, "let us go on."

Thrala's fingers had lingered on his arm and now she walked beside him, her cloak making whispering sounds as it brushed against the wall and floor.

"Wait," she cautioned suddenly. "The morgel pit . . ." Dandtan slipped by them. "I will try the door."

In a moment he was back. "It is open," he whispered.

"Kepta believes," mused Thrala, "that we will keep to the safety of the gallery. Therefore let us go through the pit. The morgels will be gone to better hunting grounds."

Through the pit they went. A choking stench arose from underfoot and they trod very carefully. They climbed the stairs on the far side unchallenged, Dandtan leading.

"The rod here, Garin," he called; "this door is barred."

Garin pressed the weapon into the other's hand and leaned against the rock. He was sick and dizzy. The long, deep wounds on his arm and shoulder were stiffening and ached with a biting throb.

When they went on he panted with effort. They still moved in darkness and his distress passed unnoticed.

"This is wrong," he muttered, half to himself. "We go too easily—"

And he was answered out of the blackness. "Well noted, outlander. But you go free for the moment, as does Thrala and Dandtan. Our full accounting is not yet. And now, farewell, until we meet again in the Hall of Thrones. I could find it in me to applaud your courage, outlander. Perhaps you will come to serve me yet."

Garin turned and threw himself toward the voice, bringing up with brusing force against rock wall. Kepta laughed.

"Not with the skill of the bull Tand will you capture me."

His second laugh was cut cleanly off, as if a door had been closed. In silence the three hurried up the ramp. Then, as through a curtain, they came into the light of Tav. Thrala let fall her drab cloak, stood with arms outstretched in the crater land. Her sparkling robe sheathed her in glory and she sang softly, rapt in her own delight. Then Dandtan put his arm about her; she clung to him, staring about as might a beauty-bewildered child.

Garin wondered dully how he would be able to make the journey back to the Caverns when his arm and shoulder were eaten with a consuming fire. The Ana crept closer to him, peering into his white face.

They were aroused by a howl from the Caves. Thrala cried out and Dandtan answered her unspoken question. "They have set the morgels on our trail!"

The howl from the Caves was echoed from the forest. Morgels before and behind them! Garin might set himself against one, Dandtan another, and Thrala could defend herself with the rod, but in the end the pack would kill them.

"We shall claim protection from the Gibi of the cliff. By the law they must give us aid," said Thrala, as, turning up her long robe, she began to run lightly. Garin picked up her cloak and drew it across his shoulder to hide his welts. When he could no longer hold her pace she must not guess the reason for his falling behind.

Of that flight through the forest the flyer afterward remembered little. At last the gurgle of water broke upon his pounding ears, as he stumbled along a good ten lengths behind his companions. They had come to the edge of the wood along the banks of the river.

Without hesitation Thrala and Dandtan plunged into the oily flood, swimming easily for the other side. Garin drop-

ped the cloak, wondering if, once he stepped into the yellow stream, he would ever be able to struggle out again. Already the Ana was in, paddling in circles near the shore and pleading with him to follow. Wearily Garin waded out.

The water, which washed the blood and sweat from his aching body, was faintly brackish and stung his wounds to life. He could not fight the sluggish current and it bore him downstream, well away from where the others landed.

But at last he managed to win free, crawling out near where a smaller stream joined the river. There he lay panting, face down upon the moss. And there they found him, water dripping from his bedraggled finery, the Ana stroking his muddied hair. Thrala cried out with concern and pillowed his head on her knees while Dandton examined his wounds.

"Why did you not tell us?" demanded Thrala.

He did not try to answer, content to lie there, her arms supporting him. Dandton disappeared into the forest, returning soon, his hands filled with a mass of crushed leaves. With these he plastered Garin's wounds.

"You'd better go on," Garin warned.

Dandton shook his head. "The morgels can not swim. If they cross, they must go to the bridge, and that is half the crater away."

The Ana dropped into their midst, its small hands filled with clusters of purple fruit. And so they feasted, Garin at ease on a fern couch, accepting food from Thrala's hand.

There seemed to be some virtue in Dandton's leaf plaster for, after a short rest, Garin was able to get to his feet with no more than a twinge or two in his wounds. But they started on at a more sober pace. Through mossy glens and sunlit glades where strange flowers made perfume, the trail led. The stream they followed branched twice before, on the edge of meadow land, they struck away from the guiding water toward the crater wall.

Suddenly Thrala threw back her head and gave a shrill, sweet whistle. Out of the air dropped a yellow and black insect, as large as a hawk. Twice it circled her head and then perched itself on her outstretched wrist.

Its swollen body was jet black, its curving legs, three to a side, chrome yellow. The round head ended in a sharp beak and it had large, many faceted eyes. The wings, which lazily tested the air, were black and touched with gold.

Thrala rubbed the round head while the insect nuzzled affectionately at her cheek. Then she held out her wrist again and it was gone.

"We shall be expected now and may pass unmolested."

Shortly they became aware of a murmuring sound. The crater wall loomed ahead, dwarfing the trees at its base.

"There is the city of the Gibi," remarked Dandton.

Clinging to the rock were the towers and turrets of many eight-sided cells.

"They are preparing for the Mists," observed Thrala. "We shall have company on our journey to the Caverns." They passed the trees and reached the foot of the wax skyscrapers which towered dizzily above their heads. A great cloud of the Gibi hovered about them. Garin felt the soft brush of their wings against his body. And they crowded each other jealously to be near Thrala.

The soft hush-hush of their wings filled the clearing as one large Gibe of outstanding beauty approached. The commoners fluttered off and Thrala greeted the Queen of the cells as an equal. Then she turned to her companions with the information the Gibi Queen had to offer.

"We are just in time. Tomorrow the Gibi leave. The morgels have crossed the river and are out of control. Instead of hunting us they have gone to ravage the forest lands. All Tav has been warned against them. But they

may be caught by the Mist and so destroyed. We are to rest in the cliff hollows, and one shall come for us when it is time to leave."

The Gibi withdrew to the cell-combs after conducting their guests to the rock-hollows.

CHAPTER NINE

Days of Preparation

GARIN WAS AWAKENED by a loud murmuring. Dandton knelt beside him.

"We must go. Even now the Gibi seal the last of the cells.

They ate hurriedly of cakes of grain and honey, and, as they feasted, the Queen again visited them. The first of the swarm were already winging eastward.

With the Gibi nation hanging like a storm cloud above them, the three started off across the meadow. The purple-blue haze was thickening, and, here and there, curious formations, like the dust devils of the desert arose and danced and disappeared again. The tropic heat of Tav increased; it was as if the ground itself were steaming.

"The Mists draw close; we must hurry," panted Dandton.

They traversed the tongue of forest which bordered the meadow and came to the central plain of Tav. There was a brooding stillness there. The Ana, perched on Garin's shoulder, shivered.

Their walk became a trot; the Gibi bunched together. Once Thrala caught her breath in a half sob.

"They are flying slowly because of us. And it's so far—"

"Look!" Dandton pointed at the plain. "The morgels!"

The morgel pack, driven by fear, ran in leaping bounds. They passed within a hundred yards of the three, yet did not turn from their course, though several snarled at them.

"They are already dead," observed Dandton. "There is no time for them to reach the shelter of the Caves."

Splashing through a shallow brook, the three began to run. For the first time Thrala faltered and broke pace. Garin thrust the Ana into Dandton's arms and, before she could protest, swept the girl into his arms.

The haze was denser now, settling upon them as a curtain. Black hair, finer than silk, whipped across Garin's throat. Thrala's head was on his shoulder, her heaving breasts arched as she gasped the sultry air.

"They—keep—watch . . ." shouted Dandton.

Piercing the gloom were pin-points of light. A dark shape grazed Garin's head—one of the Gibi Queen's guards.

Then abruptly they stumbled into a throng of the Folk, one of whom reached for Thrala with a crooning cry. It was Sera welcoming her mistress.

Thrala was borne away by the women, leaving Garin with a feeling of desolation.

"The Mists, Outlander." It was Urg, pointing toward the Cavern mouth. Two of the Folk swung their weight on a lever. Across the opening a sheet of crystal clicked into place. The Caverns were sealed.

The haze was now inky black outside and billows of it beat against the protecting barrier. It might have been midnight of the blackest, starless night.

"So will it be for forty days. What is without—dies," said Urg.

"Then we have forty days in which to prepare," Garin spoke his thought aloud. Dandton's keen face lightened.

"Well said, Garin. Forty days before Kepta may seek us. And we have much to do. But first, our respects to the Lord of the Folk."

Together they went to the Hall of Thrones where, when he saw Dandton, Trar arose and held out his jade-tipped rod of office. The son of the Ancient Ones touched it.

"Hail! Dweller in the Light, and Outlander who has fulfilled the promise of Thran. Thrala is once more within the Caverns. Now send you to dust this black throne . . ."

Garin, nothing loath, drew the destroying rod from his belt, but Dandtan shook his head. "The time is not yet, Trar. Kepta must finish the pattern he began. Forty days have we and then the Black Ones come."

Trar considered thoughtfully. "So that be the way of it. Thran did not see another war . . ."

"But he saw an end to Kepta!"

Trar straightened as if some burden had rolled from his thin shoulders. "Well do you speak, Lord. When there is one to sit upon the Rose Throne, what have we to fear? Listen, oh ye Folk, the Light has returned to the Caverns!" His cry was echoed by the gathering of the Folk.

"And now, Lord—" he turned to Dandtan with deference—"what are your commands?"

"For the space of one sleep I shall enter the Chamber of Renewing with this outlander, who is no longer an outlander but one, Garin, accepted by the Daughter according to the Law. And while we rest let all be made ready . . ."

"The Dweller in the Light has spoken!" Trar himself escorted them from the Hall.

They came, through many winding passages, to a deep pool of water, in the depths of which lurked odd purple shadows. Dandtan stripped and plunged in, Garin following his example. The water was tinglingly alive and they did not linger in it long. From it they went to a bubble room such as the one Garin had rested in after the bath of light rays, and on the cushions in its center stretched their tired bodies.

When Garin awoke he experienced the same exultation he had felt before. Dandtan regarded him with a smile. "Now to work," he said, as he reached out to press a knob set in the wall.

Two of the Folk appeared, bringing with them clean trappings. After they dressed and broke their fast, Dandtan started for the laboratories. Garin would have gone with him, but Sera intercepted them.

"There is one word speak with Lord Garin . . ."

Dandtan laughed. "Go," he ordered the American. "Thrala's commands may not be slighted."

The Hall of Women was deserted. And the corridor beyond, roofed and walled with slabs of rose-shot crystal, was as empty. Sera, drew aside a golden curtain and they were in the audience chamber of the Daughter.

A semi-circular dais of the clearest crystal, heaped with rose and gold cushions, faced them. Before it, a fountain, in the form of a flower nodding on a curved stem, sent a spray of water into a shallow basin. The walls of the room were divided into alcoves by marble pillars, each one curved in semblance of a fern frond.

From the domed ceiling, on chains of twisted gold, seven lamps, each wrought from a single yellow sapphire, gave soft light. The floor was a mosaic of gold and crystal.

Two small Anas, who had been playing among the cushions, pattered up to exchange greetings with Garin's. But of the mistress of the chamber there was no sign. Garin turned to Sera, but before he could phrase his question, she asked mockingly:

"Who is the Lord Garin that he can not wait with patience?" But she left in search of the Daughter.

Garin glanced uneasily about the room. This jeweled chamber was no place for him. He had started toward the door when Thrala stepped within.

"Greetings to the Daughter." His voice sounded formal and cold, even to himself.

Her hands, which had been outheld in welcome, dropped

to her sides. A ghost of a frown dimmed her beauty.

"Greetings, Garin," she returned slowly.

"You sent for me—" he prompted, eager to escape from this jewel box and the unattainable treasure it held.

"Yes," the coldness of her tone was an order of exile. "I would know how you fared and whether your wounds yet troubled you."

He looked down at his own smooth flesh, cleanly healed by the wisdom of the Folk. "I am myself again and eager to be at such work as Dandtan can find for me . . ."

Her robe seemed to hiss across the floor as she turned upon him. "Then go!" she ordered. "Go quickly!"

And blindly he obeyed. She had spoken as if to a servant, one whom she could summon and dismiss by whim. Even if Dandtan held her love, she might have extended him her friendship. But he knew within him that friendship would be a poor crumb beside the feast his pulses pounded for.

There was a pattering of feet behind him. So, she would call him back! His pride sent him on. But it was Sera. Her head thrust forward until she truly resembled a reptile.

"Fool! Morgel!" she spat. "Even the Black Ones did not treat her so. Get you out of the Place of Women lest they divide your skin among them!"

Garin broke free, not heeding her torrent of reproach. Then he seized upon one of the Folk as a guide and sought the laboratories. Far beneath the surface of Tav, where the light-motes shown ghostly in the gloom, they came into a place of ceaseless activity, where there were tables crowded with instruments, coils of glass and metal tubing, and other equipment and supplies. These were the focusing point for ceaseless streams of the Folk. On a platform at the far end, Garin saw the tall son of the Ancient Ones working on a framework of metal and shining crystal.

He glanced up as Garin joined him. "You are late," he accused. "But your excuse is a good one. Now get you to work. Hold this here—and here—while I fasten these clamps."

So Garin became extra hands and feet for Dandtan, and they worked feverishly to build against the lifting of the Mists. There was no day or night in the laboratories. They worked steadily without rest, and without feeling fatigue.

Twice they went to the Chamber of Renewing, but except for these trips to the upper ways they were not out of the laboratories through all those days. Of Thrala there was no sign, nor did any one speak of her.

The Cavern dwellers were depending upon two defenses: an evil green liquid, to be thrown in frail glass globes, and a screen charged with energy. Shortly before the lifting of the Mists, these arms were transported to the entrance and installed there. Dandtan and Garin made a last inspection.

"Kepta makes the mistake of under-rating his enemies," Dandtan reflected, feeling the edge of the screen caressingly. "When I was captured, on the day my people died, I was sent to the Black Ones laboratories so that their seekers after knowledge might learn the secrets of the Ancient Ones. But I proved a better pupil than teacher and I discovered the defense against the Black Fire. After I had learned that, Kepta grew impatient with my supposed stupidity and tried to use me to force Thrala to his will. For that, as for other things, shall he pay—and the paying will not be in coin of his own striking. Let us think of that . . ." He turned to greet Urg and Trar and the other leaders of the Folk, who had approached unnoticed.

Among them stood Thrala, her gaze fixed upon the crystal wall between them and the thinning Mist. She noticed Garin no more than she did the Anas playing with her train and the women whispering behind her. But Garin stepped

back into the shadows—and what he saw was not weapons of war, but cloudy black hair and graceful white limbs veiled in splendor.

Urg and one of the other chieftains bore down upon the door lever. With a protesting squeak, the glass wall disappeared into the rock. The green of Tav beckoned them out to walk in its freshness; it was renewed with lusty life. But in all that expanse of meadow and forest there was a strange stillness.

"Post sentries," ordered Dandtan. "The Black Ones will come soon."

He beckoned Garin forward as he spoke to Thrala:

"Let us go to the Hall of Thrones."

But the Daughter did not answer his smile. "It is not meet that we should spend time in idle talk. Let us go instead to call upon the help of those who have gone before us." So speaking, she darted a glance at Garin as chill as the arctic lands beyond the lip of Tav, and then swept away with Sera bearing her train.

Dandtan stared at Garin. "What has happened between you two?"

The flyer shook his head. "I don't know. No man is born with an understanding of women—"

"But she is angered with you. What has happened?"

For a moment Garin was tempted to tell the truth: that he dared not break any barrier she chose to raise, lest he seize what in honor was none of his. But he shook his head mutely. Neither of them saw Thrala again until Death entered the Caverns.

CHAPTER TEN

Battle and Victory

Garin stood with Dandtan looking out into the plain of Tav. Some distance away were two slender, steel tipped towers, which were, in reality, but hollow tubes filled with the Black Fire. Before these dark clad figures were busy.

"They seem to believe us already defeated. Let them think so," commented Dandtan, touching the screen they had erected before the Cavern entrance.

As he spoke Kepta swaggered through the tall grass to call a greeting:

"Ho, rock dweller, I would speak with you—"

Dandtan edged around the screen, Garin a pace behind. "I see you Kepta."

"Good. I trust that your ears will serve you as well as your eyes. These are my terms: Give Thrala to me to dwell in my chamber and the outlander to provide sport for my captains. Make no resistance but throw open the Caverns so that I may take my rightful place in the Hall of Thrones. Do this and we shall be at peace. . . ."

"And this is our reply:—"Dandtan stood unmovingly before the screen—"Return to the Caves; break down the bridge between your land and ours. Let no Black One come hither again, ever. . . ."

Kepta laughed. "So, that be the way of it! Then this shall we do: take Thrala, to be mine for a space, and then to go to my captains—"

Garin hurled himself forward, felt Kepta's lips mash beneath his fist; his fingers were closing about the other's throat as Dandtan, who was trying to pull him away from his prey, shouted a warning: "Watch out!"

A morgel had leaped from the grass, its teeth snapping about Garin's wrist, forcing him to drop Kepta. Then Dandtan laid it senseless by a sharp blow with his belt.

On hands and knees Kepta crawled back to his men. The lower part of his face was a red and dripping smear. He screamed an order with savage fury.

Dandtan drew the still raging flyer behind the screen. "Be a little prudent," he panted. "Kepta can be dealt with in other ways than with bare hands."

The towers were swinging their tips toward the entrance. Dandtan ordered the screen wedged tightly into place.

Outside, the morgel Dandtan had stunned got groggily to its feet. When it had limped half the distance back to its master, Kepta gave the order to fire. The broad beam of black light from the tip of the nearest tower caught the beast head on. There was a chilling stream of agony, and where the morgel had stood gray ashes drifted on the wind.

A hideous crackling arose as the black beam struck the screen. Green grass beneath seared away, leaving only parched earth and naked blue soil. Those within the Cavern crouched behind their frail protection, half blinded by the light from the seared grass, coughing from the chemical-ridden fumes which curled about the cracks of the rock.

Then the beam faded out. Thin smoke plumed from the tips of the towers, steam arose from the blackened ground. Dandtan drew a deep breath.

"It held!" he cried, betraying at last the fear which had ridden him.

Men of the Folk dragged engines of tubing before the screen, while others brought forth the globes of green liquid. Dandtan stood aside, as if this matter were the business of the Folk alone, and Garin recalled that the Ancient Ones were opposed to the taking of life.

Trar was in command now. At his orders the globes were posed on spoon-shaped holders. Loopholes in the screen clicked open. Trar brought down his hand in signal. The globes arose lazily, sliding through the loopholes and floating out toward the towers.

One, aimed short, struck the ground where the fire had burned it bare, and broke. The liquid came forth, sluggishly, forming a gray-green gas as the air struck it. Another spiral of gas arose almost at the foot of one of the towers—and then another. . . . and another.

There quickly followed a tortured screaming, which soon dwindled to a weak yammering. They could see shapes, no longer human or animal, staggering about in the fog.

Dandtan turned away, his face white with horror. Garin's hands were over his ears to shut out that crying.

At last it was quiet; there was no more movement by the towers. Urg placed a sphere of rosy light upon the nearest machine and flipped it out into the camp of the enemy. As if it were a magnet it drew the green tendrils of gas, to leave the air clear. Here and there lay shrunken, livid shapes, the towers brooding over them.

One of the Folk burst into their midst, a woman of Thrala's following.

"Haste!" She clawed at Garin. "Kepta takes Thrala!"

She ran wildly back the way she had come, with the American pounding at her heels. They burst into the Hall of Thrones and saw a struggling group before the dais.

Garin heard someone howl like an animal, became aware the sound came from his own throat. For the second time his fist found its mark on Kepta's face. With a shriek of rage the Black One threw Thrala from him and sprang at Garin, his nails tearing gashes in the flyer's face. Twice the American twisted free and sent bone-crushing blows into the other's ribs. Then he got the grip he wanted, and his fingers closed around Kepta's throat. In spite of the Black One's struggles he held on until a limp body rolled beneath him.

Panting, the American pulled himself up from the blood-stained floor and grabbed the arm of the Jade Throne for support.

"Garin!" Thrala's arms were about him, her pitting

fingers on his wounds. And in that moment he forgot Dandtan, forgot everything he had steeled himself to remember. She was in his arms and his mouth sought hers possessively. Nor was she unresponsive, but yielded, as a flower yields to the wind.

"Garin!" she whispered softly. Then, almost shyly, she broke from his hold.

Beyond her stood Dandtan, his face white, his mouth tight. Garin remembered. And, a little mad with pain and longing, he dropped his eyes, trying not to see the loveliness which was Thrala.

"So, Outlander, Thrala flies to your arms——"

Garin whirled about. Kepta was hunched on the broad seat of the jet throne.

"No, I am not dead, Outlander—nor shall you kill me, as you think to do. I go now, but I shall return. We have met and hated, fought and died before—you and I. You were a certain Garan, Marshall of the air fleet of Yu-Lac on a vanished world, and I was Lord of Koom. That was in the days before the Ancient Ones pioneered space. You and I and Thrala, we are bound together and even fate can not break those bonds. Farewell, Garin. And do you, Thrala, remember the ending of that other Garan. It was not an easy one."

With a last malicious chuckle, he leaned back in the throne. His battered body slumped. Then the sharp lines of the throne blurred; it shimmered in the light. Abruptly then both it and its occupant were gone. They were staring at empty space, above which loomed the rose throne of the Ancient Ones.

"He spoke true," murmured Thrala. "We have had other lives, other meetings—so will we meet again. But for the present he returns to the darkness which sent him forth. It is finished."

Without warning, a low rumbling filled the Cavern; the walls rocked and swayed. Lizard and human, they huddled together until the swaying stopped. Finally a runner appeared with news that one of the Gibi had ventured forth and discovered that the Caves of Darkness had been sealed by an underground quake. The menace of the Black Ones was definitely at an end.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Thrala's Mate

Although there were falls of rock within the Caverns and some of the passages were closed, few of the Folk suffered injury. Gibi scouts reported that the land about the entrance to the Caves had sunk, and that the River of Gold, thrown out of its bed, was fast filling this basin to form a lake.

As far as they could discover, none of the Black Ones had survived the battle and the sealing of the Caves. But they could not be sure that there was not a handful of outlaws somewhere within the confines of Tav.

The Crater itself was changed. A series of row hills had appeared in the central plain. The pool of boiling mud had vanished and trees in the forest lay flat, as if cut by a giant scythe.

Upon their return to the cliff city, the Gibi found most of their skyscrapers in ruins, but they set about rebuilding without complaint. The squirrel-farmers emerged from their burrows and were again busy in the fields.

Garin felt out of place in all the activity that filled the Caverns. More than ever he was the outlander with no true roots in Tav. Restlessly, he explored the Caverns, spending many hours in the Place of Ancestors, where he

studied those men of the outer world who had preceded him into this weird land.

One night when he came back to his chamber he found Dandtan and Trar awaiting him there. There was a curious hardness in Dandtan's attitude, a somber sobriety in Trar's carriage.

"Have you sought the Hall of Women since the battle?" demanded the son of the Ancient One abruptly.

"No," retorted Garin shortly. Did Dandtan accuse him of double dealing?

"Have you sent a message to Thrala?"

Garin held back his rising temper. "I have not ventured where I can not."

Dandtan nodded to Trar as if his suspicions had been confirmed. "You see how it stands, Trar."

Trar shook his head slowly. "But never has the summoning been at head——"

"You forget," Dandtan reminded him sharply. "It was once—and the penalty was exacted. So shall it be again."

Garin looked from one to the other, confused. Dandtan seemed possessed of a certain ruthless anger, but Trar was manifestly unhappy.

"It must come after council, the Daughter willing," the Lord of the Folk said.

Dandtan strode toward the door. "Thrala is not to know. Assemble the Council tonight. Meanwhile, see that he," he jerked his thumb toward Garin, "does not leave this room."

Thus Garin became a prisoner under the guard of the Folk, unable to discover of what Dandtan accused him, or how he had aroused the hatred of the Cavern ruler. Unless Dandtan's jealousy had been aroused and he was determined to rid himself of a rival.

Believing this, the flyer went willingly to the chamber where the judges waited. Dandtan sat at the head of a long table, Trar at his right hand and lesser nobles of the Folk beyond.

"You know the charge," Dandtan's words were tipped with venom as Garin came to stand before him. "Out of his own mouth has this outlander condemned himself. Therefore I ask that you decree for him the fate of that outlander of the second calling who rebelled against the summoning."

"The outlander has admitted his fault?" questioned one of the Folk.

Trar inclined his head sadly. "He did."

As Garin opened his mouth to demand a stating of the charge against him, Dandtan spoke again:

"What say you, Lords?"

For a long moment they sat in silence and then they bobbed their lizard heads in assent. "Do as you desire, Dweller in the Light."

Dandtan smiled without mirth. "Look, outlander." He passed his hand over the glass of the seeing mirror set in the table top. "This is the fate of him who rebels——"

In the shining surface Garin saw pictured a break in Tav's wall. At its foot stood a group of men of the Ancient Ones, and in their midst struggled a prisoner. They were forcing him to climb the crater wall. Garin watched him reach the lip and crawl over, to stagger across the steaming rock, dodging the scalding vapor of hot springs, until he pitched face down in the slimy mud.

"Such was his ending, and so will you end——"

The calm brutality of that statement aroused Garin's anger. "Rather would I die that way than linger in this den," he cried hotly. "You, who owe your life to me, would send me to such a death without even telling me of what I am accused. Little is there to choose between you and

Kepta, after all—except that he was an open enemy!"

Dandtan sprang to his feet, but Trar caught his arm. "He speaks fairly. Ask him why he will not fulfill the summoning."

While Dandtan hesitated, Garin leaned across the table, flinging his words, weapon-like, straight into that cold face.

"I'll admit that I love Thrala—have loved her since that moment when I saw her on the steps of the morgel pit in the caves. Since when has it become a crime to love that which may not be yours—if you do not try to take it?"

Trar released Dandtan, his golden eyes gleaming. "If you love her, claim her. It is your right."

"Do I not know," Garin turned to him, "that she is Dandtan's. Thran had no idea of Dandtan's survival when he laid his will upon her. Shall I stoop to holding her to an unwelcome bargain? Let her go to the one she loves..."

Dandtan's face was livid, and his hands, resting on the table, trembled. One by one the lords of the Folk slipped

away, leaving the two face to face.

"And I thought to order you to your death." Dandtan's whisper was husky as it emerged between dry lips. "Garin, we thought you knew—and, knowing, had refused her."

"Knew what?"

"That I am Thran's son—and Thrala's brother."

The floor swung beneath Garin's unsteady feet. Dandtan's hands were warm on his shoulders.

"I am a fool," said the American slowly.

Dandtan smiled. "A very honorable fool! Now get you to Thrala, who deserves to hear the full of this tangle."

So it was that, with Dandtan by his side, Garin walked for the second time down that hallway, to pass the golden curtains and stand in the presence of the Daughter. She came straight from her cushions into his arms when she read what was in his face. They needed no words.

And in that hour began Garin's life in Tav.

If you liked this story, you'll be glad to know that there's a sequel—tentatively scheduled for the third issue...

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NEW SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK

The fan press has been very complimentary to my collection, *AWAY FROM THE HERE AND NOW*. For instance, said Editor MacInnes of it (in *Necromancer*): "Superlative yarns from *Weird Tales*, *Amazing Stories* and *Science Wonder Quarterly*. Lose no time coming by the volume—you'll be delighted. It is finely bound and makes for extremely good reading." Priced at \$2.50, it is available from Forrest Ackerman, 236½ N. New Hampshire, Hollywood 4, Calif. As one fan to another, I hope you'll like my stories (11 of them, in 365 pages.) Sincerely, Claire Winger Harris.

Table of Contents: "A Runaway World", "The Fate of the Poseidonias", "A Certain Soldier", "The Diabolical Drug", "The Miracle of the Lily", "A Baby on Neptune", "The Artificial Man", "The Menace of Mars", "The Evolutionary Monstrosity", "The 5th Dimension", "The Ape Cycle".

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

THE SHIP OF DARKNESS by A. E. van Vogt

Learn the mystery of the Ship of Space—two miles long, half a mile wide, and—a *foot thick!* Discover the secret of the lir... thrill to the bizarre beauty of the Woman of the Void!

STAR OF THE UNDEAD by Paul Dennis Lavond

It was *evil*—this sparkling aura, this stardust from hell! But it was alive—dangerously so... and Master Pilot Devlin finds himself pitted against it in a grim struggle for survival...

BARGAIN WITH BEELZEBUB by Gene Hunter

Sure, you can gamble with Satan... the stakes are high and he deals the cards... But Langdon held five aces... how could he lose?

CAVERNS OF ITH by Basil Wells

Deep inside the earth the representatives of Terra find... an exotic world... strange, primitive creatures who can fashion living matter out of *nothingness*... weirdly glowing crystalline caves and fiery lakes... and an unseen justice which guides the destiny of Ith...

AND OTHERS

*The tale of a Dreamer whose dreams
merged with grim reality.*

BLACK LOTUS

By Robert Bloch

THIS IS THE STORY of Genghir the dreamer, and of the curious fate that overtook him in his dreams; a story old men whisper in the souks of Ispahan as other old men once whispered it in fabled Teraz, five thousand years ago. What portion of it is truth and what portion only fantasy, I leave unto your judgment. There are strange sayings in the banned books, and Alhzared had reasons for his madness; but as I have said, the judgment rests with you. I but relate the tale.

Know then that Genghir was lord over a distant kingdom in the days of the griffin and the fleet-winged unicorn. Rich and powerful was his domain, and peaceful and well-ruled withal, so that its sovereign need occupy himself only with his pleasures.

Handsome was Genghir, but formed as a woman is formed, so that he cared not for the chase or manly combat. His days were spent in rest and study, and his nights in revelry amongst the women. The functions of government rested upon the shoulders of Hassim el Wadir, the Vizier, whilst the true sultan dallied at his pleasures.

Grievous was the life he led, and soon the land was torn by disension and corruption. But this Genghir heeded not at all, and Hassim he ordered flayed for misuse of his office. And there was revolution and killing throughout the land; and then a fearful plague arose; but all this Genghir minded not, even though two-thirds of his people died. For his thoughts were alien and far away, and the weight of his rule he felt as but a feather. His eyes knew only the musty pages of ensorcelled books and the soft white flesh of women. The witchery of words and wine and wenches cast a spell upon his senses. There was dark magic in the black-bound books his father had brought from ancient conquered realms, and there was enchantment in the old wines and the young bodies that his desires knew; so that he lived in a land of unreality and dreams. Surely he would have died were it not that those left in the land, after the plague, had fled to other kingdoms, leaving him in an empty city. The report of their going never reached his ears, for well his courtiers knew that those who brought displeasing news were beheaded. But one by one they slipped away, taking with them gold and precious jewels, until the palace lay deserted under a sun that shone upon a barren land.

No longer did the women rest within the zenana, or disport as nymphs beside the amber pools. The sultan turned to other pleasures from the realms of Cathay, and in robes of velvet black he lay and toyed with the juices of the poppy. Then did life become indeed but a dream, and the opium-visioned nightmares took on the semblances of events and places mentioned in the eldritch volumes that he read by day. Time became but as the lengthening of a monstrous dream. Genghir ventured forth into his gardens no more, and less and less did he partake of food or wine. Even his books he forgot, and lay for all the time in a drugged sleep, nor



heeded the coming and going of the few followers that remained within his retinue. And a silence of desolation fell upon the land.

NOW IT CAME to pass that opium and other drugs were not enough, so that Genghir was forced to seek recourse in other and more potent distillations. And in one of the curious evil books he read of a subtle potion brewed from the juices of the Black Lotus that grows beneath the waning moon. Dire and dreadful were the warnings of the scribe regarding the concoction of this forbidden preparation, for its genesis was deemed unholy, and the dangers surrounding its use by a novice were couched in trenchant terms. But Genghir thirsted for the lurid magic of its dreams and for the promise of its delight, nor would he be content until he should taste of its forbidden ecstasy.

His palace stood dim and deserted, for in the latter days the remnant of his sycophants and horis had departed from the dusky halls whose cheap splendours had long since been bartered for the true delights found only in the land of opiate dreams. There now remained but three faithful servitors to guard Genghir on his couch of visions, and these he called unto his side and commanded them to journey forth and seek the venom-distilled beauty of the Black Lotus, in the hidden swamps afar of which the cryptic book had told. And they were much afraid, both for him and for themselves, because they had heard curious legends; with one accord they beseeched him to recall his words. But he grew angered, and his eyes were seen to flame like opals, whereat they departed.

A fortnight passed ere one of them returned—a fortnight during which the dreamer tried in vain to beguile his satiated senses with

the common reek of the white flower. Overjoyed was he when the slave returned with his precious burden and brewed from it the blissful juices of napanthe, following the injunctions set forth in the curious book. But he did not speak of his journey, or venture aught concerning the fate of his two companions; and even the dazed dreamer wondered why he kept his features veiled. In his eagerness he did not inquire, but was content to see the philtre carefully compounded and the pearly-hued liquor inserted in the nargileh. Immediately upon the completion of this task, the servitor departed, and no man knows the manner of his going, save that he lashed his camel far across the desert, riding as though possessed by demons. Genghir did not note his geni-beset progress, for already he was enraptured at the thought of what was to come. Indeed he had not stirred from his divan in the palace chambers, and in his brain was naught but the thirsty dement of desire for the strange new thrill foretold in the elder lore. Queer dreams were promised to him who durst inhale the fumes, dreams of which the old book dare not even hint—"Dreams which surpass Reality, or blend with it in new and unhallowed ways." So spake the scribes, but Genghir was not afraid, and heeded only the promise of delights it was said to hold.

And so it was that he lay on his couch that evening and smoked his hookah alone in the deepening darkness, a dream-king in a land where all but dreams was dead. His divan overlooked the balcony high above the empty city, and as the moon rose, its crescent-given rays glistened upon the iridescent bubbings of the white fluid in the great bowl through which the smoke was drawn. Sweet indeed was the essence's taste, sweeter than the honeycombs of Kashmir or the kisses of the chosen brides of Paradise. Slowly there came stealing over his senses a new and delightful languor—it was as if he were a creature free-born, a being of the boundless air. He gazed half-seeing at the bubbles, and suddenly they bubbled up, up, up, until they bathed the room in a veil of shimmering beauty, and he felt all identity vanish in their crystalline depths.

NOW ENSUED a period of profound and mystic sadness. He seemed to lie within the graven walls of a tomb, upon a slab of pale-white marble. Shrill funeral pipings seemed to echo from afar, and his nostrils were titillated by the distilled aromatic incense of the sepulchral lily. He knew himself to be dead, and yet he retained the consciousness that was his own in life. The timelessness of common dreams was not his lot; centuries passed on leadenly, and he knew every second of their length as he lay within the tomb of his fathers; enmausoleumed upon a slab covered with stone that was carved with demon-given basileisks.

Long after the odors and the music had faded from the darkness in which he lay came the advent of corruption. He felt his body grow bloatedly purulescent; felt his features coagulate and his limbs slough off into charnel, oozing slime. And even that was as an instant in the weary, dragging hours of his eternity there. So much longer did he lie bodiless that he lost all conscious recollection of ever having possessed one, and even the dust that had been his bones lost all significance to him. The past, present and future were as naught; and thus unconsciously Genghir had revealed unto him the basic mystery of life.

Years later the crumbling walls clove thunderously asunder, and shards of debris covered over the decaying slab that now housed naught but an undying consciousness. And even they were overcast by dust and earth, until there was but nothingness to mark the sight of the proud tomb where once lay the lords of the house of Genghir. And the soul of Genghir was as nothingness alone amongst nothingness.

Such was the substance of the first dream. As the flicker of his soul expired into everlasting darkness within the earth, Genghir awoke, and he was sweat-bathed, trembling with fear, and as pale as the death he feared. And anon he turned the pages of his book to where it spoke of the Lotus and its prophecies thereof and this he read:

"The first dream shall foretell that which is to come."

Whereat Genghir grew much afraid, and closed the book in the ensilvered moonlight, then lay back upon his couch and tried to sleep, and to forget. But then there came stealing upon his senses the subtly sweet odor of the essence, and its magic englamoured and engulfed, till he grew frantic with the insidious craving for its sinister soothing. Forgotten was fear and prophetic warning; all dissolved into desire. His fumbling fingers found the hookah, his feverish lips closed upon the stem, and his being knew peace.

But not for long. Once again the opaque mists of roseate, sweet voluptuousness parted and dissolved, and the enchantment of rapturous, ineffable bliss faded as a new vision supervened.

He saw himself awaken and rise from the couch in the light of dawn, to gaze haggardly upon a new day. He saw the wretched agony of his being as the drug wore off its potency and left his body racked with spasms of exquisite pain. His head seemed to swell as if about to burst; his rotting, nightmare brain seemed to grow inside his skull and split his head asunder. He beheld his frantic gropings about the deserted chamber, the mad capers of grotesque agony that made him tear his hair and foam epileptically at the mouth and gibber terribly as he clawed with twitching fingers at his temples. The white-hot mist of searing anguish sent him reeling to the floor, and then it seemed as though in his dream-consciousness there came to him a horrible longing to be rid of his torment at any cost, and to escape from a living hell to a dead one. In his madness he cursed the book and the warning; cursed the ghastly lotus flower and its essence; cursed himself and his pain. And as the stark biting teeth of his torture bored still closer to the roots of his sanity, he saw himself drag his rigid, paralytic body to the outer balcony of his deserted palace, and with a grimace of agony greater than can be sensed by sanity, he raised himself slowly to the rail. Meanwhile, as he stood there, his head swelled and bloated to monstrous, unbelievable proportions, then burst rottenly asunder in a ghastly blob of gray and scarlet putrefaction, from which arose the stupefying scent of black lotuses. Then, with a single inarticulate cry of horror and despair, he crumpled and toppled from the balcony, to spatter himself in red madness upon the court below.

At this instant he awoke, and his teeth shook inside his mouth as he gagged and retched in terrible repulsion. He felt old and decrepit, and the tide of life ebbed in his veins. He would have fainted were it not for the revivifying fumes of the nargileh that still smoldered beside him. Then unto himself he swore a mighty oath to abandon the ways of the dreamer forever, and rose to his feet and took unto himself the book and turned the pages to the passage of warning, wherein he read this rune:

"The second dream shall show what might have been."

Then there descended upon him a resignation and a black despair. All of his life unrolled before him once again and he knew himself for what he was—a deluded fool. And he knew also that if he did not go back to his drugged slumber there would come to pass the horror of his second dream, as it foretold. So, wearily, and with queer wonder in his heart, he clasped the book to his bosom and betook himself once again to his couch in the moonlight. And his pale fingers lifted the hookah to his ashen lips once again and he once more knew the bliss of Nirvana. He was under the compulsion of a sorcerous thrall.

... On night-black lotus flower, that growth beneath the River Nile! Oh poisoned perfumer of all darkness, waving and weaving in the spells of moonlight! Oh cryptic magic that worketh only evil! ...

Genghir the Dreamer slept. But there was brooding ecstasy and mystic wonder in his dreams, and he knew the beauty that lies in twilight grottoes on the dark side of the moon, and his brow was fanned and his slumbers lulled by the pale wind that is the little gods who dance in paradise. And he stood alone in a sea of endless infinity, before a monstrous flower that beckoned great, hypnotic petals before his dream-dazed eyes, and whispered unto him a com-

mand. In his vision he glanced down to where a dagger hung by his side, in his jeweled stomacher of sultanship.

And there came to him a sudden gleam of understanding. This before him was the Black Lotus, symbol of the evil that waits for men in sleep. It was casting a spell upon him that would lure him to death. He knew now the way of atonement for the past and the release of his enchantment—he must strike!

But even as he moved, the great flower shot out one velvet petal steeped in the cloying scent that was a wind from the gate of heaven. And the black petal entwined itself about his neck like a loathsome and beautiful serpent, and with its succubi-like embrace sought to drown his senses in a sea of scented bliss.

But Genghir would not be frustrated. The allurements of delight left him cold, but his numbing brain commanded him. He

raised the silver dagger from his side and with a single blow, slashed off the twining coiler from his neck. . . .

Then Genghir saw the flowers and the petals vanish, and he was left alone in a universe of mocking laughter; a dim world that rocked with leering mirth of idiotic gods. For an instant he awoke to see a ruby necklace encircling his bare throat; to realize monstrously that in his dream he had cut his own throat. Then, on a bed of moonlight, he died, and there was silence in the deserted room, while from the dead throat of Genghir the Dreamer little drops of blood fell upon an open page of a curious book; upon a curious sentence in oddly underlined letters:

"The third dream brings reality."

Nothing more remained, save the all-pervading scent of lotus-flowers that filled the nighted room.

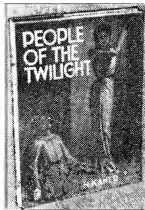
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*Haunted by their dark heritage, a medieval fate
awaited them . . .*

STRANGE ALLIANCE

BY BRYCE WALTON

DOCTOR SPECHAUG stopped running, breathing deeply and easily where he paused in the middle of the narrow winding road. He glanced at his watch. Nine a.m. He was vaguely perplexed because he did not react more emotionally to the blood staining his slender hands.

It was fresh blood, though just beginning to coagulate; it was dabbled over his brown serge suit, splotching the neatly starched white cuffs of his shirt. His wife always did them up so nicely with the peasant's love for trivial detail.

He had always hated the silent ignorance of the peasants who surrounded the little college where he taught psychology. He supposed that he had begun to hate his wife, too, when he realized, after taking her from a local barnyard and marrying her, that she could never be anything but a sloe-eyed, shuffling peasant.

He walked on with brisk health down the narrow dirt road that led toward Glen Oaks. Elm trees lined the road. The morning air was damp and cool. Dew kept the yellow dust settled where spots of sunlight came through leaves and speckled it. Birds darted freshly through thickly hung branches.

He had given perennial lectures on hysterical episodes. Now he realized that he was the victim of such an episode. He had lost a number of minutes from his own memory. He remembered the yellow staring eyes of the breakfast eggs gazing up at him from a sea of grease. He remembered his wife screaming—after that only blankness.

He stopped on a small bridge crossing Calvert's Creek, wiped the blood carefully from his hands with a green silk handkerchief. He dropped the stained silk into the clear water. Silver flashes darted up, nibbled the cloth as it floated down. He watched it for a moment, then went on along the shaded road.

This was his chance to escape from Glen Oaks. That was what he had wanted to do ever since he had come here five years ago to teach. He had a good excuse now to get away from the shambling peasants whom he hated and who returned the attitude wholeheartedly—the typical provincial's hatred of culture and learning.

Then he entered the damp, chilled shadows of the thick wood that separated his house from the college grounds. It was thick, dense, dark. One small corner of it seemed almost ordinary, the rest was superstition haunted, mysterious and brooding. This forest had provided Doctor Spechaug many hours of escape.

He had attempted to introspect, but had never found satisfactory causes for his having found himself running through these woods at night in his bare feet. Nor why he sometimes hated the sunlight.



HE TENSED in the dank shadows. Someone else was in this forest with him. It did not disturb him. Whatever was here was not alien to him or the forest. His eyes probed the mist that slithered through the ancient mossy trees and hanging vines. He listened, looked, but found nothing. Birds chattered, but that was all. He sat down, his back against a spongy tree trunk, fondled dark green moss.

As he sat there, he knew that he was waiting for someone. He shrugged. Mysticism was not even interesting to him, ordinarily. Still, though a behaviorist, he upheld certain instinctual motivation theories. And, though reluctantly, he granted Freud contributory significance. He could be an atavist, a victim of unconscious regression. Or a prey of some insidious influence, some phenomena a rather childish science had not yet become aware of. But it was of no importance. He was happier now than he had ever been. He felt free— young and new. Life seemed worth living.

Abruptly, with a lithe liquid ease, he was on his feet, body tense, alert. Her form was vaguely familiar as she ran toward him. She dodged from his sight, then re-appeared as the winding path cut behind screens of foliage.

She ran with long smooth grace, and he had never seen a woman run like that. A plain skirt was drawn high to allow long bronzed legs free movement. Her hair streamed out, a cloud of red-gold. She kept looking backwards and it was obvious someone was chasing her.

He began sprinting easily toward her, and as the distance

shortened, he recognized her. Edith Bailey, a second year psychology major who had been attending his classes two semesters. Very intelligent, reclusive, not a local grown product. Her work had a grimness about it, as though psychology was a dire obsession, especially abnormal psychology. One of her theme papers had been an exhaustive, mature but somehow overly determined treatise on self-induced hallucination and auto-suggestion. He had not been too impressed because of an unjustified emphasis on supernatural myth and legend, including werewolves, vampires, and the like.

She sprang to a stop like a cornered deer as she saw him suddenly blocking the path. She turned, then stopped and turned back slowly. Her eyes were wide, cheeks flushed. Taut breasts rose and fell deeply, and her hands were poised for flight.

But she wasn't looking at his face. Her gaze was on the blood splattering his clothes.

He was breathing deeply too. His heart was swelling with exhilaration. His blood flowed hotly. Something of the whirling ecstasy he had known back in his student days as a track champion returned to him—the mad bursting of the wind against him, the wild passion of the dash.

A burly figure came lurching after her down the path. A tramp, evidently, from his filthy, smoke-sodden clothes and thick stubble of beard. He recalled the trestle west of the forest where the bindlestiffs from the Pacific Fruit line jungled up at nights, or during long layovers. Sometimes they came into the forest.

He was big, fat and awkward. He was puffing and blowing, and he began to groan as Doctor Spechaug's fists thudded into his flesh. The degenerate fell to his knees, his broken face blowing out bloody air. Finally he rolled over onto his side with a long sighing moan, lay limply, very still. Doctor Spechaug's lips were thin, white, as he kicked savagely. He heard a popping. The bum flopped sidewise into a pile of dripping leaves.

He stepped back, looked at Edith Bailey. Her full red lips were moist and gleaming. Her oddly opaque eyes glowed strangely at him. Her voice was low, yet somehow, very intense.

"Wonderful laboratory demonstration, Doctor. But I don't think many of your student embryos would appreciate it."

DOCTOR SPECHAUG nodded, smiled gently. "No. An unorthodox case." He lit a cigarette, and she took one. Their smoke mingled with the dissipating morning mist. And he kept on staring at her. A pronounced sweater girl with an intellect. This—he could have loved. He wondered if it were too late.

Doctor Spechaug had never been in love. He wondered if he were now with this fundamental archetypal beauty. "By the way," he was saying, "what are you doing in this evil wood?"

Then she took his arm, very naturally, easily. They began walking slowly along the cool, dim path.

"Two principal reasons. One, I like it here; I come here often. Two, I knew you always walk along this path, always late for your eight o'clock class. I've often watched you walking here. You walk beautifully."

He did not comment. It seemed unnecessary now. "The morning's almost gone," she observed. "The sun will be out very warm in a little while. I hate the sun."

On an impulse he said: "I'm going away. I've wanted to get out of this obscene nest of provincial stupidity from the day I first came here. And now I've decided to leave." "What are you escaping from?"

He answered softly. "I don't know. Something Freudian,

no doubt. Something buried, buried deep. Something too distasteful to recognize."

She laughed. "I knew you were human and not the cynical pseudo-intellectual you pretended to be. Disgusting, isn't it?"

"What?"

"Being human, I mean."

"I suppose so. I'm afraid we're getting an extraordinarily prejudiced view. I can't help being a snob here. I despise and loathe peasants."

"And I," she admitted. "Which is merely to say, probably, that we loathe all humanity."

"Tell me about yourself," he said finally.

"Gladly. I like doing that—to one who will understand. I'm nineteen. My parents died in Hungary during the War. I came here to America to live with my uncle. But by the time I got here he was dead, too. And he left me no money, so there was no sense being grateful for his death. I got a part-time job and finished high school in Chicago. I got a scholarship to—this place." Her voice trailed off. She was staring at him.

"Hungary!" he said and repeated it. "Why—I came from Hungary!"

Her grip on his arm tightened. "I knew—somehow. I remember Hungary—its ancient horror. My father inherited an ancient castle. I remember long cold corridors and sticky dungeons, and cobwebbed rooms thick with dust. My real name is Burbmann. I changed it because I thought Bailey more American."

"Both from Hungary," mused Doctor Spechaug. "I remember very little of Hungary. I came here when I was three. All I remember are the ignorant peasants. Their dumb, blind superstition—their hatred for—"

"You're afraid of them, aren't you?" she said.

He started. "The peasants. I——" He shook his head. "Perhaps."

"You're afraid," she said. "Would you mind telling me, Doctor, how these fears of yours manifest themselves?"

He hesitated; they walked. Finally he answered. "I've never told anyone but you. There are hidden fears. And they reveal themselves consciously in the absurd fear of seeing my own reflection. Of not seeing my shadow. Of——"

She breathed sharply. She stopped walking, turned, stared at him. "Not—not seeing you—reflection!"

He nodded.

"Not seeing you—shadow!"

"Yes."

"And the full moon. A fear of the full moon, too?"

"But how did you know?"

"And you're allergic to certain metals, too. For instance—silver?"

He could only nod.

"And you go out in the night sometimes—and do things—but you don't remember what?"

He nodded again.

Her eyes glowed brightly. "I know. I know. I've known those same obsessions ever since I can remember."

Doctor Spechaug felt strangely uneasy then, a kind of dreadful loneliness.

"Superstition," he said. "Our Old World background, where superstition is the rule, old, very old superstition. Frightened by them when we were young. Now those childhood fixations reveal themselves in crazy symptoms."

He took off his coat, threw it into the brush. He rolled up his shirt sleeves. No blood visible now. He should be able to catch the little local passenger train out of Glen Oaks without any trouble. But why should there be any trouble? The blood——

He thought too that he might have killed the tramp, that popping sound.

She seemed to sense his thoughts. She said quickly: "I'm going with you, Doctor."

He said nothing. It seemed part of the inevitable pattern.

THEY ENTERED the town. Even for mid-morning the place was strangely silent, damply hot, and still. The town consisted of five blocks of main street from which cowpaths wound off aimlessly into fields, woods, meadows and hills. There was always a few shuffling, dull-eyed people lolling about in the dusty heat. Now there were no people at all.

As they crossed over toward the shady side, two freshly-clothed kids ran out of Davis' Filling Station, stared at them like vacant eyed lambs, then turned and spurted inside Ken Wanger's Shoe Hospital.

Doctor Spechaug turned his dark head. His companion apparently hadn't noticed anything ominous or peculiar. But to him, the whole scene was morose, fetid and brooding.

They walked down the cracked concrete walk, passed the big plate-glass windows of Murphy's General Store which were a kind of fetish in Glen Oaks. But Doctor Spechaug wasn't concerned with the cultural significance of the windows. He was concerned with *not looking into it.*

And oddly, he never did look at himself in the glass, neither did he look across the street. Though the glass did pull his gaze into it with an implacable somewhat terrible insistence. And he stared. He stared at that portion of the glass which was supposed to reflect Edith Bailey's material self—but *didn't reflect anything. Not even a shadow.*

They stopped. They turned slowly toward each other. He swallowed hard, trembled slightly. And then he knew deep and dismal horror. He studied that section of glass where her image was supposed to be. *It still wasn't.*

He turned. And she was still standing there. "Well?" And then she said in a hoarse whisper: "*Your reflection—where is it?*"

And all he could say was: "And yours?"

Little bits of chuckling laughter echoed in the inchoate madness of his suddenly whirling brain. Echoing years of lecture on—cause and effect, logic. Little bits of chuckling laughter. He grabbed her arm.

"*We—we can see our own reflections, but we can't see each others!*"

She shivered. Her face was terribly white. "What—what is the answer?"

No. He didn't have it figured out. Let the witches figure it out. Let some old forbidden books do it. Bring the problem to some warlock. But not to him. He was only a Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology. But maybe—

"Hallucinations," he muttered faintly. "Negative hallucinations."

"Doctor. Did you ever hear the little joke about the two psychiatrists who met one morning and one said, 'You're feeling excellent today. How am I feeling?'"

He shrugged. "We have insight into each other's abnormality, but are unaware of the same in ourselves."

"That's the whole basis for psychiatry isn't it?"

"In a way. But this is physical—functional—when psychiatry presents situation where—" His voice trailed off.

"I have it figured this way." How eager she was. Somehow, it didn't matter much now, to him. "We're conditioned to react to reality in certain accepted ways. For instance that we're supposed to see our shadows. So we see them. But in our case they were never really there to see. Our sanity or 'normalcy' is maintained that way. But the constant auto-

illusion—must always lead to neuroticism and pathology—the hidden fears. But these fears must express themselves.. So they do so in more socially acceptable ways."

Her voice suddenly dropped as her odd eyes flickered across the street. "But we see each other as we really are," she whispered tensely. "Though we could never have recognized the truth in ourselves."

She pointed stiffly. Her mouth gaped, quivered slightly. He turned slowly. His mouth twitched with a growing terrible hatred. They were coming for him now.

FOUR MEN WITH RIFLES were coming toward him. Stealthily creeping, they were, as though it were some pristine scene with caves in the background. They were bent slightly, stalking. Hunters and hunted, and the law of the wild and two of them stopping in the middle of the street. The other two branched, circled, came at him from either side, clumping down the walk. George recognized them all. The town marshal, Bill Conway, and Mike Lash, Harry Hutchinson, and Dwight Farrigon.

Edith Bailey was backed up against the window. Her eyes were strangely dilated. But the faces of the four men exuded cold animal hate, and blood-lust.

Edith Bailey's lips said faintly, "What—what are you going to do?"

He felt so calm. He felt his lips writhe back in a snarl. The wind tingled on his teeth. "I know now," he said. "I know about the mientes I lost. I know why they're after me. You'd better get away."

"But why the—the guns?"

"I murdered my wife. She served me greasy eggs. God—she was an animal—just a dumb beast!"

Conway called, his rifle crooked in easy promising grace. "All right, Doc. Come on along without any trouble. Though I'd just as soon you made a break. I'd like to shoot you dead, Doctor."

"And what have I done, exactly," said Doctor Spechaug. "He's hog-wild," yelled Mike Lash. "Cuttin' her all up that way! Let's string 'em up!" Conway yelled something about a "fair trial", though not with much enthusiasm.

Edith screamed as they charged toward them. A wild, inhuman cry.

Doctor Spechaug's eyes flashed up the narrow street. "Let's go!" he said to Edith Bailey. "They'll see running they've never seen before. They can't touch us."

They ran. They heard the sharp crack of rifles. They saw the dust spurting up. Doctor Spechaug heard himself howling as he became aware of peculiar stings in his body. Queer, painless, deeply penetrating sensations that made themselves felt all over his body—as though he was awakening from a long paralysis.

Then the mad yelling faded rapidly behind them. They were running, streaking out of the town with inhuman speed. They struck out in long easy strides across the meadow toward the dense woods that brooded beyond the college.

Her voice gasped exultingly. "They couldn't hurt us! They couldn't! They tried!"

He nodded, straining eagerly toward he knew not what, nosing into the fresh wind. How swiftly and gracefully they could run. Soon they lost themselves in the thick dark forest. Shadows hid them.

DAYS LATER the moon was full. It edged over the low hill flanking Glen Oaks on the east. Junebugs buzzed ponderously like arm-ork-plated dragons toward the lights glowing faintly from the town. Frogs croaked from the swampy meadows and the creek.

They came up slowly to stand silhouetted against the glowing moon, nosing hungrily into the steady, aromatic breeze blowing from the Conway farm below.

They glided effortlessly down, then across the sharp-bladed marshgrass, leaping high with each bound. As they came disdainfully close to the silent farm house, a column of pale light from a coaloil lamp came through the living room window and haloed a neglected flower bed. Sorrow and fear clung to the house.

The shivering shadow of a gaunt woman was etched against the half drawn shade. The two standing outside the window called. The woman's shadow trembled.

Then a long rigid finger of steel projected itself beneath the partially raised window. The rifle cracked almost against the faces of the two. He screamed hideously as his companion dropped without a sound, twitching, twitching—

he screamed again and began dragging himself away toward the sheltering forest. Intently and desperately the rifle cracked again.

He gave up then.

He sprawled out flatly on the cool, damp, moon-bathed path. His hot tongue lapped feverishly at the wet grass. He felt the persistent impact of the rifle's breath against him, and now there was a wave of pain. The full moon was fading into black mental clouds as he feebly attempted to lift his bleeding head.

He thought with agonized irony:

"Provincial fools. Stupid, superstitious idiots . . . and that damned Mrs. Conway—the most stupid of all. *Only she would have thought to load her dead husband's rifle with silver bullets!* Damned peasants——"

Total darkness blotted out futile reverie.

—O—

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—Jack Parrish

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*The little man dared to venture into the realm
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MICRO-MAN

BY WEAVER WRIGHT

THE EARLY MORNING streetcar, swaying and rattling along its tracks, did as much to divert my attention from the book I was reading as the contents of the book itself. I did not like Plato. Comfortable though the seat was, I was as uncomfortable as any collegiate could be whose mind would rather dwell upon tomorrow's football game than the immediate task in hand—the morning session with Professor Russell and the book on my lap.

My gaze wandered from the book and drifted out the distorted window, then fell to the car-sill as I thought over Plato's conclusions. Something moving on the ledge attracted my attention: it was a scurrying black ant. If I had thought about it, I might have wondered how it came there. But the next moment a more curious object on the sill caught my eye. I bent over.

I couldn't make out what it was at first. A bug, perhaps. Maybe it was too small for a bug. Just a little dancing dust, no doubt.

Then I discerned—and gasped. On the sill, there—it was a man! A man on the streetcar's window sill—a *little* man! He was so tiny I would never have seen him if it hadn't been for his white attire, which made him visible against the brown grain of the shellacked wood. I watched, amazed as his microscopic figure moved over perhaps half an inch.

He wore a blouse and shorts, it seemed, and sandals. Something might have been hanging at his side, but it was too small for me to make out plainly. His head, I thought was silver-coloured, and I think the headgear had some sort of knobs on it. All this, of course, I didn't catch at the time, because my heart was hammering away excitedly and making my fingers shake as I fumbled for a matchbox in my pocket. I pushed it open and let the matches scatter out. Then, as gently as my excitement would allow, I pushed the tiny man from the ledge into the box; for I had suddenly realized the greatness of this amazing discovery.

The car was barely half-filled and no attention had been directed my way. I slid quickly out of the empty seat and hurriedly alighted at the next stop.

In a daze, I stood where I had alighted waiting for the next No. 10 that would return me home, the match-box held tightly in my hand. They'd put that box in a museum one day!

I collect stamps—I've heard about getting rare ones with inverted centers, or some minor deviation that made them immensely valuable. I'd imagined getting one by mistake sometime that would make me rich. But this! They'd billed "King Kong" as "The Eighth Wonder of the World,"



but that was only imaginary—a film... a terrifying thought crossed my mind. I pushed open the box hastily: maybe I had been dreaming. But there it was—the unbelievable; the Little Man!

A car was before me, just leaving. Its polished surface had not reflected through the haze, and the new design made so little noise that I hadn't seen it. I jumped for it, my mind in such a turmoil that the conductor had to ask three times for my fare. Ordinarily, I would have been embarrassed, but a young man with his mind on millions doesn't worry about little things like that. At least, not this young man.

How I acted on the streetcar, or traversed the five blocks from the end of the line, I couldn't say. If I may imagine myself, though, I must have strode along the street like a determined machine. I reached the house and let myself into the basement room. Inside, I pulled the shades together and closed the door, the matchbox still in my hand. No one was at home this time of day, which pleased me particularly, for I wanted to figure out how I was going to present this wonder to the world.

I flung myself down on the bed and opened the matchbox. The little man lay very still on the bottom.

"Little Man!" I cried, and turned him out on the quilt. Maybe he had suffocated in the box. Irrational thought! Small though it might be to me, the little box was as big as all outdoors to him. It was the bumping about he'd endured; I hadn't been very thoughtful of him.

He was reviving now, and raised himself on one arm. I pushed myself off the bed, and stepped quickly to my table to procure something with which I could control him. Not that he could get away, but he was so tiny I thought I might lose sight of him.

Pen, pencil, paper, stamps, scissors, clips—none of them were what I wanted. I had nothing *dennite* in mind, but then remembered my stamp outfit and rushed to secure it. Evidently college work had cramped my style along the collecting line, for the tweezers and magnifier appeared with a mild coating of dust. But they were what I needed, and I blew on them and returned to the bed.

The little man had made his way half an inch or so from his former prison; was crawling over what I suppose were, to him, great uneven blocks of red and green and black moss.

He crossed from a red into a black patch as I watched his movements through the glass, and I could see him more plainly against the darker background. He stopped and picked at the substance of his strange surroundings, then straightened to examine a tuft of the cloth. The magnifier enlarged him to a seeming half inch or so, and I could see better, now, this strange tiny creature.

It was a metal cap he wore, and it did have protruding knobs—two of them—slanting at 45 degree angles from his temples like horns. I wondered at their use, but it was impossible for me to imagine. Perhaps they covered some actual growth; he might have had real horns for all I knew. Nothing would have been too strange to expect.

His clothing showed up as a simple, white, one piece garment, like a shirt and gym shorts. The shorts ended at the knee, and from there down he was bare except for a covering on his feet which appeared more like gloves than shoes. Whatever he wore to protect his feet, it allowed free movement of his toes.

It struck me that this little man's native habitat must have been very warm. His attire suggested this. For a moment I considered plugging in my small heater; my room certainly had no tropical or sub-tropical temperature at that time of the morning—and how was I to know whether he shivered when he felt chill. Maybe he blew his horns. Anyway, I figured a living Eighth Wonder would be more valuable than a dead one; and I didn't think he could be stuffed. But somehow I forgot it in my interest in examining this unusual personage.

The little man had dropped the cloth now, and was staring in my direction. Of course, "my direction" was very general to him; but he seemed to be conscious of me. He certainly impressed me as being awfully different, but what his reactions were, I didn't know.

But someone else knew.

IN A WORLD deep down in Smallness, in an electron of a dead cell of a piece of wood, five scientists were grouped before a complicated instrument with a horn like the early radios. Two sat and three stood, but their attention upon the apparatus was unanimous. From small hollowed cups worn on their fingers like rings, came a smoke from burning incense. These cups they held to their noses frequently, and their eyes shone as they inhaled. The scientists of infra-smallness were smoking!

With the exception of a recent prolonged silence, which was causing them great anxiety, sounds had been issuing from the instrument for days. There had been breaks before, but this silence had been long-enduring.

Now the voice was speaking again; a voice that was a telepathic communication made audible. The scientists brightened.

"There is much that I cannot understand," it said. The

words were hesitant, filled with awe. "I seem to have been in many worlds. At the completion of my experiment, I stood on a land which was brown and black and very rough of surface. With startling suddenness, I was propelled across this harsh country, and, terrifyingly, I was falling. I must have dropped seventy-five feet, but the strange buoyant atmosphere of this strange world saved me from harm.

"My new surroundings were grey and gloomy, and the earth trembled as a giant cloud passed over the sky. I do not know what it meant, but with the suddenness characteristic of this place, it became very dark, and an inexplicable violence shook me into insensibility.

"I am conscious, now, of some giant form before me, but it is so colossal that my eyes cannot focus it. And it changes. Now I seem confronted by great orange mountains with curving ledges cut into their sides. Atop them are great, greyish slabs of protecting opaque rock—a covering like that above our Temples of Aera—'on which the rain may never fall.' I wish that you might communicate with me, good men of my world. How go the Gods?

"But now! These mountains are lifting, vanishing from my sight. A great *thing* which I cannot comprehend hovers before me. It has many colors, but mostly there is the orange of the mountains. It hangs in the air, and from the portion nearest me grow dark trees as round as myself and as tall. There is a great redness above, that opens like the Katus flower, exposing the ivory white from which puffs the Tongue of Death. Beyond this I cannot see well, but ever so high are two gigantic caverns from which the Winds of the Legends blow—and suck. As dangerous as the Katus, by Dal! Alternately they crush me to the ground, then threaten to tear me from it and hurl me away."

My nose was the cavern from which issued the horrifying wind. I noticed that my breath distressed the little man as I leaned over to stare at him, so drew back.

Upstairs, the visor buzzed. Before answering, so that I would not lose the little man, I very gingerly pinched his shirt with the tongs, and lifted him to the table.

"My breath! I am shot into the heavens like Milo and his rocket! I traverse a frightful distance! Everything changes constantly. A million miles below is chaos. This world is mad! A giant landscape passes beneath me, so weird I cannot describe it. I—I cannot understand. Only my heart trembles within me. Neither Science nor the gods can help or comfort in this awful world of Greatness!

"We stop. I hang motionless in the air. The ground beneath is utterly insane. But I see vast uncovered veins of rare metal—and crystal, precious crystal, enough to cover the mightiest Temple we could build! Oh, that Mortia were so blessed! In all this terrifying world, the richness of the crystal and the marvelous metal do redeem.

"Men!—I see. . . I believe it is a temple! It is incredibly tall, of black foundation and red spire, but it is weathered, leaning as if to fall—and very bare. The people cannot love their Gods as we—or else there is the Hunger. . . But the gods may enlighten this world, too, and if lowered, I will make for it. A sacred Temple should be a haven—friends! I descend."

The little man's eye had caught my scissors and a glass ruler as I suspended him above my desk. They were his exposed vein of metal and the precious crystal. I was searching for something to secure him. In the last second before I lowered him, his heart swelled at the sight of the "Temple"—my red and black pen slanting upward from the desk bolder.

A stamp lying on my desk was an inspiration. I licked it, turned it gum side up, and cautiously pressed the little man against it feet first. With the thought, "That ought to hold

him," I dashed upstairs to answer the call.

But it didn't hold him. There was quite a bit of strength in that tiny body.

"Miserable fate! I flounder in a horrid marsh," the upset thought-waves came to the men of Mortia. "The viscous mire seeks to entrap me, but I think I can escape it. Then I will make for the Temple. The Gods may recognize and protect me there."

I MISSED THE CALL—I had delayed too long—but the momentary diversion had cleared my mind and allowed new thoughts to enter. I now knew what my first step would be in presenting the little man to the world.

I'd write a newspaper account myself—exclusive! Give the scoop to Earl. Would that be a sensation for *his* paper! Then I'd be made. A friend of the family, this prominent publisher had often promised he would give me a break when I was ready. Well, I *was* ready!

Excited, dashing downstairs, I half-formulated the idea. The headlines—the little man under a microscope—a world afire to see him. Fame... pictures... speeches... movies... money... But here I was at my desk, and I grabbed for a piece of typing paper. They'd put that in a museum, too!

The stamp and the little man lay just at the edge of the sheet, and he clutched at a "great orange mountain" covered by a "vast slab of curving, opaque glass" like the "Temples of Aerat." It was my thumb, but I did not see him there.

I thrust the paper into the typewriter and twirled it through.

"I have fallen from the mountain, and hang perpendicularly, perilously, on a limitless white plain. I tremble, on the verge of falling, but the slime from the marsh holds me fast."

I struck the first key.

"A metal meteor is roaring down upon me. Or is it something I have never before witnessed? It has a tail that streams off beyond sight. It comes at terrific speed.

"I know. The Gods are angry with me for leaving Mortia

• • • • •

land. Yes! 'Tis only They who kill by iron. Their hands clutch the rod in mighty tower Baviat, and thrust it here to stamp me out."

And a shaking little figure cried: "Baviat tertia!... Mortia mea..." as the Gods struck wrathfully at a small one daring to explore their domain. For little man Jeko had contrived to see Infinity—and Infinity was only for the eyes of the Immortals, and those of the Experience who dwelt there by the Gods' grace. He had intruded into the realm of the rulers, the world of the After Life and the Gods Omnipotent!

A mortal—in the land of All!

In a world deep down in Smallness, in an electron of a cell of dead wood, five scientists were grouped before the complicated instrument so reminiscent of early radios. But now they all were standing. Strained, perspiring, frightened, they trembled, aghast at the dimensions the experiment had assumed; they were paralysed with terror and awe as they heard of the wrath of the affronted Gods. And the spirit of science froze within them, and would die in Mortia land. "Seek the skies only by hallowed Death" was what they knew. And they destroyed the machine of the man who had found Venquill land—and thought to live—and fled as Jeko's last thoughts came through.

For many years five frightened little men of an electron world would live in deadly fear for their lives, and for their souls after death; and would pray, and become great disciples, spreading the gospels of the Gods. True, Jeko had described a monstrous world; but how could a mere mortal experience its true meaning? It was really ethereal and beautiful, was Venquill land, and they would spend the rest of their days insuring themselves for the day of the experience—when they would assume their comforted place in the world of the After Life.

As I struck the first letter, a strange sensation swept over me. Something compelled me to stop and look at the typing paper. I was using a black ribbon, but when the key fell away, there was a tiny spot of red...

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FLIGHT THROUGH TOMORROW

BY STANTON A. COBLENTZ

1

NOTHING WAS further from my mind, when I discovered the "Release Drug" Keim, than the realization that it would lead me through as strange and ghastly and revealing a series of adventures as any man has ever experienced. I encountered it, in a way, as a mere by-product of my experiments; I am a chemist by profession, and as one of the staff of the Morganstern Foundation have access to some of the best equipped laboratories in America. The startling new invention—I must call it that, though I did not create it deliberately—came to me in the course of my investigations into the obscure depths of the human personality.

It has long been my theory that there is in man a psychic entity which can exist for at least brief periods apart from the body, and have perceptions which are not those of the physical senses. In accordance with these views, I had been developing various drugs, compounded of morphine and adrenelin, whose object was to shock the psychic entity loose for limited periods and so to widen the range and powers of the personality. I shall not go into the details of my researches, nor tell by what accident I succeeded better than I had hoped; the all-important fact—a fact so overwhelming that I shudder and gasp and marvel even as I tell of it—is that I did obtain a minute quantity of a drug which, by putting the body virtually in a state of suspended animation, could release the mind to travel almost at will across time and space.

Yes, across time and space!—for the drag of the physical having been stricken off, I could enter literally into infinity and eternity. But let me tell precisely what happened that night when at precisely 10:08 in the solitude of my apartment room, I swallowed half an ounce of Relin and stretched myself out on the bed, well knowing that I was taking incalculable risks, and that insanity and even death were by no means remote possibilities of the road ahead. But let that be as it may! In my opinion, there is no coward more despicable than he who will not face danger for the sake of knowledge.

My head reeled, and something seemed to buzz inside it as soon as the bitter half ounce of fluid slipped down my throat. I was barely able to reach the bed and throw myself upon it when there came a snapping as of something inside my brain... then, for a period, blankness... then a gradual awakening with that feeling of exhilaration one experiences only after the most blissful sleep. I opened my eyes, feeling strong and light of limb and charged with a marvelous vital energy—but, as I peered about me, my lips drew far apart in astonishment, and I am sure that I gaped like one who has seen a ghost.

Where were the familiar walls of my two-by-four room, the bureau, the book-rack, the ancient portrait of Pasteur that hung in its glass frame just above the foot of the bed? Gone! vanished as utterly as though they had never been! I was standing on a wide and windy plain, with the gale beating in my ears,

and with rapid sunset-colored clouds scudding across the blood-stained west. Mingled with the wailing of the blast, there was a deep sobbing sound that struck me in successive waves, like the ululations of great multitudes of far-off mourners. And while I was wondering what this might mean and felt a pricking of horror along my spine, the first of the portants swept across the sky. I say "portants," for I do not know by what other term to describe the apparitions; high in the heavens, certainly at an altitude of many miles, the flaming thing swept across my view, comet-shaped and stretching over at least ten degrees of arc, swift as a meteor, brilliantly flesh-red, sputtering sparks like an anvil, and leaving behind it a long ruddy trail that only slowly faded out amid the darkening skies.

It must have been a full minute after its disappearance before the hissing of its flight came to my ears—a hissing so sharp, so nastily insistent that it reached me even above the noise of the wind. And more than another minute had passed before the earth beneath me was wrenched and jarred as if by an earthquake and the most thunderous detonations I had ever heard burst over me in a prolonged series.

Let me emphasize that none of this had the quality of a dream; it was clear-cut, as vivid as anything I had ever experienced; my mind worked with an unusual precision and clarity, and not even a fleeting doubt came to me of the reality of my observations. "This is some sort of bombing attack," I remember reflecting, "some assault of super-monsters of the skies, perfected by a super science." And I did not have to be told the fact; I knew, as by an all-illuminating inner knowledge, that I had voyaged into the future.

Even as this realization came to me, I made another flight—and one that was in space more than in time. It did not surprise me, but I took it as the most natural thing in the world when I seemed to rise and go floating away through the air. It was still sunset-time, but I could see clearly enough as I went drifting at a height of several hundred yards above a vast desolated space near the junction of two rivers. Perhaps, however, "desolated" is not the word I should use; I should say, rather, "shattered, pulverized, obliterated," for a scene of more utter and hopeless ruin I have never seen nor imagined. Over an area of many square miles, there was nothing but heaps and mounds of broken stone, charred and crumbling brick, fire-scarred timbers, and huge contorted masses of rusting steel like the decaying bones of superhuman monsters. From the great height and extent of the piles of debris, and from the occasional sight of the splintered cornice of a roof or of some battered window-frame or door, I knew that this had once been a city, one of the world's greatest; but no other recognizable feature remained amid the gray masses of ruins, and the very streets and avenues had been erased. But here and there a tremendous crater, three hundred feet across and a hundred to a hundred and fifty feet deep, indicated the source of the destruction.

As if to reinforce the dread idea that had taken possession of

my brain, one of the comet-like red prodigies went streaking across the sky even as I gazed down at the dead city; and I knew—as clearly as if I had seen the whole spectacle with my own eyes—that the missile had sprung from a source hundreds or thousands of miles away, possibly across the ocean; and that, laden with scores of tons of explosives, it had been hurled with unerring mechanical accuracy upon its mission of annihilation.

Then I seemed to float over vast distances of that sunset-tinted land, and saw great craters in the fields, and villages shot to ribbons, and farms abandoned; and the wild dogs fought for the wild cattle; and thistles grew deep on acres where wheat had been planted, and weeds sprouted thickly in the orchards, and blight and mildew competed for the crops. But though here and there I could see a dugout, with traces of fire and abandoned tools flung about at random, nowhere in all that dismal world did I observe a living man.

After a time I returned to a place near the ruined city by the two rivers; and in the rocky palisades above one of the streams, I made out some small circular holes barely large enough to admit a man. And, borne onward by some impulse of curiosity and despair, I entered one of these holes, and went downward, far downward into the dim recesses. And now for the first time, at a depth of hundreds of yards, I did at last encounter living men. My first thought was that I had gone back to the day of the cave-man, for a cave-like hollow had been scooped out in the solid rock. It was true that the few hundreds of people huddled together there had the dress and looks of moderns; it was true, also, that the gloom was lighted for them by electric bulbs, and that electric radiators kept them warm; yet Dante himself, in painting the ninth circle of his *Inferno*, could not have imagined a drearier and more despondent group than these that slouched and drooped and muttered in that cavernous recess, seated with their heads fallen low upon their knees, or moodily pacing back and forth like captives who can hope for no escape. "Here at least we will be safe from the sky marauders," I heard one of them muttering. Yet I could not help wondering what the mere safety of the body could mean when all the glories of man's civilization were annihilated.

II

THERE CAME a whirring in my head, and another blank interval; and when I regained my senses I knew that another period of time had passed, possibly months or even years. I stood on the palisade above the river, near the entrance of the caves; and the sun was bright above me; but there was no brightness in the men and women that trailed out of a small circular hole in the ground. Drab as dock-rats, and pasty pale of countenance as hospital inmates, and with bent backs and dirty, tattered clothes and a mouse-like nosing manner, they emerged with the wariness of hunted refugees; and they flung up their hands with low cries to shield them from the brilliance of the sun, to which they were evidently unaccustomed. From the packs on their backs and the bundles in their hands, I knew that they were emerging from their subterranean refuge, to try to begin a new life in the ravaged world above; and my heart went out to them, for I saw that, few as they were—not more than fifty in all—they were the sole survivors of a once-populous region, and would have a bitter fight to wage in the man-made wilderness that had been a world metropolis.

But as they roamed above through the waste of ash and rubble, and as they wandered abroad where the fields had been and saw how every brush and tree had been seared from the earth or poisoned by chemical brews, I knew that their fight was not merely a bitter one—it was hopeless. And I heard them muttering among themselves, "We have not even any tools!"; and again, "We have no fuel left for the great machines!"... For

they had lived in a highly mechanical world, and the technicians who alone understood the workings of that world had all been destroyed, and the sources of power had all been cut off—and power was the food without which they could not long survive.

Unable to endure their haggard, hangdog looks and grim, despondent eyes, I went wandering far away, over the length and breadth of many lands. And nowhere did I see a factory that had not been hammered to dust, nor a village that had not been unroofed or burnt, nor a farm where the workers went humming on their merry, toilsome way. Yet here and there I did observe little knots of survivors. Sometimes they were half-clad groups, lean and ferocious as famished wolves, who roamed the houseless countryside with stones and clubs, hunting the wild birds and hares, or making meager meals from bark and roots. Sometimes three or four men, with the frenzied eyes and hysterical shrieks and shouts of maniacs, would emerge from a brush hut by a river flat. Sometimes little bands of men and women, in a dazed aimless way, would go wandering about a huge jagged hole in the ground, where their homes and their loved ones lay buried. I came upon solitary refugees high up on the scarred mountain slopes, with nothing but a staff to lean upon and a deer-skin to keep them warm. I saw more than one twisted form lying motionless at the foot of a precipice. I witnessed a battle between two half-crazed, ravenous bands, with murder, and cannibalism, and horrors too grisly to report. I observed brave men resolutely trying to till the soil, whose productive powers had been ruined by a poison spray from the sky; and I noted some who, though the fields remained fertile enough, had not the seed to plant; and others who had not the tools with which to plow and reap. And some who, with great labor, managed to produce enough for three or four mouths, had twenty or thirty to feed; and where the three or four might have lived, the twenty or thirty perished.

Then, with a great sadness, I knew that man, having become civilized, cannot make himself into a savage again. He has come to depend upon science for his sustenance, and when he himself has destroyed the means of employing that science, he is as a babe without milk. And it is not necessary to destroy all men in order to exterminate mankind; one need only take from him the prop of his mechanical inventions.

III

Again there came a blankness, and I passed over a stretch of time, perhaps over years or even decades. And I had wandered far in space, to an island somewhere on a sunny sea; and there once more I heard the sound of voices. And somehow, through some deeper sense, I knew that these were the voices of the only men left anywhere on the whole wide planet. And I looked down on them, and saw that they were but few, no more than a dozen men and women in all, with three or four children among them. But their faces, unlike those which I had seen before, were not haggard and seamed, nor avid like those of hunting beasts, nor distorted by fury or famine. Their brows were broad and noble, and their eyes shone with the sweetness of great thoughts, and their smiles were as unuttered music; and when they glanced at me with their clear, level gaze, I knew that they were such beings as poets had pictured as dwellers in a far tomorrow. And I did not feel sad, though I could not forget that they were the only things in human form that one could find on all earth's shores, and though I knew that they were too few to perpetuate their kind for long. Somehow I felt some vast benevolent spirit in control, that these most precious specimens of our race should endure when all the wreckers had vanished.

As I watched, I saw the people all turning their eyes to an eastern mountain, whose summit still trailed the golden of the dawn-clouds. And from above the peak a great illuminated

sphere, like a chariot of light, miraculously came floating down; and the blaze was such that I could hardly bear to look at it. And exclamations of wonder and joy came from the people's throats; and I too cried out in joy and wonder as the radiant globe descended, and as it alighted on the plain before us, casting a sunlike aura over everything in sight. Then through the sides of the enormous ball—I would not say, through the door, for nothing of the kind was visible—a glorious being emerged, followed by several of his kind. He was shaped like a man, and was no taller than a man, and yet there was that about him which said that he was greater than a man, for light seemed to pour from every cell of his body, and a golden halo was about his head, and his eyes shot forth golden beams so intense and so magnetic that, once having observed them, I could hardly take my gaze away.

With slow steps he advanced, motioning the people to him; and they drew near, and flung themselves before him on the ground, and cried out in adoration. And I too threw myself to earth, in worship of this superhuman creature; and I heard the words he spoke, and with some deeper sense I translated them, though they were not uttered in any language I knew:

"Out of the stars we come, O men! and back to the stars we shall go, that the best of your race may be transplanted there, and survive through means known to us, and again be populous and great. Through the immense evil within the breasts of your kind, you have been purged and all but annihilated; but the good within your race has also been mighty, and can never

be expunged; and that good has called through you surviving few to us your guardians, that we may take you to another planet, and replenish you there, and teach you that lore of love and truth and beauty which the blind members of your species have neglected here while they unfitted the earth for human habitation."

So speaking, the radiant one motioned to the people, who arose, and followed him inside the great sphere of light; and when they had all entered, it slowly began to ascend, and slowly dwindled and disappeared against the morning skies. And now, I knew, there was no longer a man left anywhere on earth; yet as I gazed at the deserted shore, the empty beach and the bare mountainside, a sense of supreme satisfaction came over me, as though I knew that in the end, after fire and agony and degradation, all was eternally well.

That sense of supreme satisfaction remained with me when, after still another blank interval, I opened my eyes as from a deep slumber, and stared at the familiar bookrack, the bureau, the mottled paper walls of my own room. The clock on the little table at my side indicated the hour of 10:09—in other words, all that had happened had occupied the space of one minute! Yet I know as surely as I know that I write these words—that the Release Drug had freed my spirit to range over thousands of miles of space, and that I have looked on people and events which no other eye will view for scores, hundreds or even thousands of years to come.

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WALLS OF ACID

BY HENRY HASSE

BRAANOL STIRRED, THROBBED sluggishly once, then lay quiescent as his mental self surged up from the deeps of non-entity. And gradually he came to know that someone had entered the room. His room, far beneath the city.

Now he could feel the vibra-currents through the liquids of the huge tanks where he had lain somnolent for untold aeons. It was pleasant, caressing. For a moment he floated there, enjoying to the utmost this strange sensation as the renewed thought-life-force set his every convolution to pulsing.

"To be once more aware! O gloriously aware!" the thought came fierce and vibrant. "Once more they have wakened me—but how long has it been?" Then curiously: "And what can they want this time?"

The huge brain was alert now, with a supernal sense of keening. Tentatively he sent out a thought-potential that encompassed the room.

"They are afraid!" he sensed. "Two have entered here, and they are afraid of me. I shall remedy that!"

Braanol lowered his thought-potential to one-eighth of one magnitude, and felt his mind contact theirs. "Approach, my children," he said kindly. "You have nothing to fear from me! I take it you are the imperial messengers sent by her Supreme Magnificence, the Empress Alaazar?"

He felt the fright slip from their minds. But they were startled.

"The Empress Uldulla reigns now, fourth in the Royal line," came the thought. "Empress Alaazar died long ago!"

"I am truly grieved!" Braanol flashed to them. "Alaazar—may she rest in peace—did not neglect me! How well I remember her interest in the stories I could tell, stories of the Diskra of old when we sent men out to glorious adventures on the other planets! Aye! Five milleniums ago it was that we achieved space travel. In those days—"

Braanol ceased in his reminiscences, aware that these two were trying to get their thoughts through to him.

"That is why we have come! The Empress Uldulla, too, wishes a story. The story of the first space-flight from Diskra, and the events that brought it about. And of how you—"

"Aye! Of how I came to be as you see me now! I shall be delighted, my children, to tell it again. But first, prepare the trans-selector so that it may be recorded faithfully."

Braanol directed them to a machine on the far side of the room, and instructed them as to its operation. Soon the hundreds of tiny coils were humming, and a maze of tubes fed out of the machine, on which would be recorded Braanol's every thought. For a moment he paused, gently swaying, pulsing, a huge independent brain suspended in the pale green liquid. Then he began his story.

YOUR SUPREME BENEFICENCE! When the imperial messengers came to me, bringing the communication with which you

deigned to address my decrepit solitude, it was like a glorious ray of light come to illumine the deepening darkness of my declining years!

It is with trepidation that I set about to fulfill your Exalted Command. Five milleniums, aye, even more, have passed, since those who were part of that segment of history into which You inquire, have become but drifting dust. Only within the feeble memory of your humblest servant is there any record of it.

Five milleniums! Aye! That was truly the golden period of our beloved Diskra—not that our period under Your Serene Effulgence is not golden indeed! But in that day all Diskra was under the glorious rule of Palladin. His city on the scarlet shores of our central sea was the wonder of us all. Aye! We had a sea then, where there is now but desert.

The intelligent planets were three: our own Diskra, of course, fourth from the sun. And nearest the sun, Mirla, that fiery globe, where life aces the quality of our own salamander, existing by necessity near the flames. And second from the sun Venia, the cloud-capped world, where life exalts the virtues of the fish. Of the third planet, Terra, we then knew little.

Our cities faced the sun in those days, towering in polychromatic splendor. Height was no obstacle then, for we had wings—wings! Think of it, O Beneficence! No need had we of clumsy, metal vessels. But all that has changed. Now no whirr of wings disturbs the air, and our formi-technical splendors rise *within*. The history of this change is what Your Supreme Exaltation would know. This, then, is the record.

With the rule of Palladin was born the age of science, not so much due to the intellects of that day, as through the driving urge of ultimate necessity. For Palladin had a brother, Thid. He was unfortunately a mutant. Whereas our features were delicate and quite regular, Thid's were gross and stamped with power. His royal head was too large and cumbersome, and instead of our slender waists, he was almost asymmetrical in shape. In short—no member of our fairer, royal sex could look upon him with aught but horror. And it was because of this that he was dietetically conditioned for the realm of science.

It was a mistake. As the years passed, the loneliness of his virtual exile tended to derange Thid's prodigious mind! Aye, prodigious—and dangerous in his manic-depressive state. Then one day Palladin called an emergency meeting of the Inner Council. I, Braanol, was a member of that Council.

"It has come to my attention," Palladin said, "that Thid has been carrying on certain dangerous experiments! Experiments of a sort that could well be inimical to us—to our very existence!"

We well knew to what Palladin referred. But Thid was his brother, one of the Imperial ones. No one dared speak.

"Why was I not made aware of it sooner?" Palladin demanded sternly. "You, Braanol! You knew of it?"

"Yes, your majesty." I was frightened. "I beg to explain—I have tried to dissuade him—"

Palladin's visage became less stern, as though he understood our reluctance in this matter. "True," he said. "Thid is my brother. He must be mad! And I tell you now: if he has gone as far in this experiment as I suspect, I shall not hesitate to apply the only remedy dictated by efficiency—death! Have him brought to me at once."

But Thid was nowhere to be found. He had learned of Palladin's anger, and had fled into the Diskran desert where the abhorred *Termaans* dwelt in myriads despite all our effort to eradicate them. These *Termaans* were soft-bodied, subterranean creatures with an obstinate life-force, and we had long realized that they might one day be a menace to us.

So into the desert our Thid fled, spurred by the knowledge that his life was forfeit. For a time, he was naturally thought dead. Who could survive unprotected the extremes of heat and cold? And if by a miracle he triumphed over the elements, how survive the appalling enmity of the *Termaans*, whose rudimentary brains conceived no mercy?

Nevertheless, startling bits of rumor began to drift in to our city; rumors that Thid had been seen, *leading hordes of gigantic Termaans across the desert wastes!*

We laughed, of course, for caravaneers are ever the prey of sun mirages, and legends are dear to their souls. A legend was begun concerning Thid. Arriving caravans vied with each other in fantastic reports. Some had seen him with immense hordes of the repulsive *Termaans*. Still others had discovered subterranean labyrinths being built by the *Termaans* under his command, and had barely escaped with their lives. And still we laughed, blessed by the constant climate on the shores of our sea, and the beneficent rule of our Exalted Palladin.

And then we ceased to laugh. Palladin called together his Council of Scientists.

"Can it be?" Palladin asked. "Two whole caravans have vanished on the way to Estka beyond the mountains." And he told us more, reports that had arrived from other cities. Survivors had arrived, with the light of madness in their eyes, babbling some nameless fear. Others had died from ghastly wounds—great burns that refused to heal, but spread a kind of disease through the tissues. I, Braanol, examined some of these wounds and reported to Palladin.

"Only a perverted, scientific intellect such as Thid's could have evolved weapons to inflict such wounds!"

"If he has organized the *Termaans*," suggested another Council Member, "despite their pigmy size, they will become a menace that cannot be ignored."

"We have delayed too long!" thundered Palladin. "Find Thid! I command it!"

AN ARMY, THE GREATEST ever assembled on Diskra, was sent forth to hunt out Thid and exterminate the *Termaans* whom he had managed to organize by heaven only knew what magic. The planet must be cleansed of that leprous form of life, else there would be no peace.

But we did not know what depths of horror we were to plumb. Even now, O Illustrious Empress, reason reels and totters at the remembrance. I led one fine division of the Imperial Guards, armored warriors of the first magnitude. With them I felt able to conquer planets, not to speak of the trivial-sized *Termaans*.

For many days we trekked, penetrating ever deeper the Red Desert's heart. But of the abhorred *Termaans* we caught no sight. There was only the molten downpour of sun by

day, and the disincanting numbness of cold at night. But on the sixth day, as we encamped near an underground pool located by our experts—we encountered the *Termaans*.

The blue wings of dusk were beating down when suddenly, from every rampart of sand-dune, every crumbling hillock, out of the very bowels of the planet itself, they came like an avalanche. They carried slender metal tubes that spewed polychromatic death at us! Wherever the deadly discharge touched, would appear horrible burns that ate away the tissues. But that isn't what paralyzed us. We had known these vermin to be short of twelve inches tall, but now they reared monstrously *four feet into the air!* Their black, hairy limbs lashed in an ecstasy of murder-lust, their beady eyes gleamed with fiendish purpose. And they had *intelligent leaders!*

The sight of these monsters grown to such awful size struck terror into the hearts of our legion. Nevertheless, we, who are seven feet tall, towered above them as we fought with the strength and ferocity of desperation. Every weapon at our command was brought into play, and they were blasted and seared by the myriads. Still they came on, blindly, unswervingly, as if driven by a single prodigious force.

How these life-forms had grown to such bestial proportions was not known until later. We captured a few and delicately probed them—while still alive, of course—dissecting their anatomy until we found that some genius had managed to control their growth through glandular development. That genius could only have been our Thid!

Soon the desert was covered by a sea of their dead—and ours! The stench was unbearable, for the *Termaans* exude an odor of their own, particularly in death, which is sheer nausea... but lest I offend your refined sensibilities, O Serene Empress, perhaps it were best that I draw a veil of darkness over that shambles of horror. At last it seemed as if only utter annihilation of both sides would be the outcome. Already the battle had lasted for three obeisances of our Diskra to its parent sun.

And then wisely, our glorious Palladin flashed to us the command to retreat.

"Already Estka and Kraaj have fallen, with all the populace wiped out," said the message. "The *Termaans* are converging upon our capital city! Return here with all haste!"

So it was that we retreated—those who remained of us—to the capitol, and prepared to make a formidable stand. The other armies of our empire had done likewise. Who would have thought that this despised, destructive form of life could ever become such a menace! We remembered one of Thid's treatises on the noxious pests, in which he had maintained that they had rudimentary intelligence and an interesting, if sub-primitive, form of social life. How we had laughed at the thought of imputing a social order to these subterranean aphids!

But we weren't laughing now! A race of malignant monsters had sprung up in the twenty years that Thid had vanished into the desert.

OF THID, nothing more was seen. But we knew he must still exist somewhere among the *Termaans*. Under that baleful inventive genius their weapons seemed to multiply, and we were forced to tax our scientists to the utmost in order to have weapons of offense—and yes, O Beneficence—defense!

For now, though we had managed to stem their attack on our capital, they were steadily encroaching on our territory. Underground lakes and streams were damned by these fiends. Vast areas of vegetation were denuded. Precious mines of rare metals were converted by them, under Thid's direction, into sources for their ceaseless attacks. Aye! We died a thousand deaths multiplied a thousand times.

Our ethero-magnum, by which our telepathic vibrations were amplified for planetary broadcast, became a monotonous recorder of tragedy as city after city fell to the hordes. For untold years this savage struggle went on. How well we realized that this was a war for sole dominance of the planet!

Until at last, only our proud capital by the shores of the scarlet sea, and its immense valley was left to us.

"We must evolve the principles of inter-spatial travel," Palladin told us sadly. "The day may come when we shall need it."

Hitherto, our rare flights to Venia and Mirla had been primitive affairs in which the dangerous rocket principle was employed, with the terrific effects of acceleration crushing the crews and making landing an even greater hazard than the flight itself. But now, through inconceivable efforts of thought—aye, through sheer desperation!—our scientists evolved a system of atomic integration in which free orbital electrons were utilized to create atomic quantities beyond our known table, drawing upon the energy that could be harnessed in the process. It is difficult to describe otherwise than through pure mathematics—though if your Serene Effulgence wishes, I will be happy to describe it to you at a later date; it will take some little effort to recall the exact formulae.

"We must send an expedition to Terra," Palladin told us. "From what we have been able to gather astronomically, that planet seems habitable. Mirla, we know, is out of the question; it is a holocaust of fire. And to dwell on the semi-aquatic world of Venia, a new environmental adaptation would be necessary."

"Fantastic, wasn't it, O Exalted Empress, that we the right-lords of Diskra should be compelled to abandon our beloved homes by a horde of vermin? Indeed it was a tragic day when the first scientific expedition was assembled. And I, Braanon, was honored beyond my humble deserts by his Supreme Magnificence, Palladin. I was assigned as *Recorder* on the expedition.

Strapped and cushioned until not an inch of my body was visible, I was launched into space together with my fellow scientists, within the spheroid confines of our atomic projectile. The agony of enduring—even for seconds—the required acceleration, will forever remain in my mind as the ultimate in torture. But at last the agony was gone, as we traveled at unimaginable speed toward the planet which we hoped would be our future home.

No, not hoped—because meanwhile on Diskra the experiments with acid gas were going on, in a sort of last ditch defense which we hoped might stem the endless hordes!

IT WAS ON THE eleventh day that we really saw Terra in its full prismatic glory. For days it had loomed larger in our three-dimensional electro-cone, where we studied its continents and oceans to select the likeliest spot for a landing. Terra was intensely blue now, rivalling in color the priceless *zafirines* of our own Diskra. I hope in the humblest depths of my mind, O Empress Uldulla, that you shall never know the unplumbed abyss of loneliness we all felt.

At last we were forced to use the forward atomic beam to brake our meteoric entrance into the heavy atmosphere. We had, of course, turned on the neutralizing frigi-rectifiers that formed a network on the outer shell of our sphere. At last we were through. Dipping lower as we circled, we discerned majestic oceans; ice-cold peaks crowning the stark glory of the landscape, and then more inviting lands criss-crossed by rivers and studded with shining lakes.

It was to us, O Great Beneficence, a paradise indeed! Entranced, we all but forgot our landing which would require

the utmost skill. Brunoj, our greatest navigator, was at the controls, padded and cushioned beyond the possibility of injury. The rest of us retired to the special crash-room.

I remember we carried in our laboratory, in a special container of *glassaran*, two embalmed specimens of the monstrous *Termans*. These we were to show as a warning to whatever race existed here. One glance at the revolting monsters would have been enough for an intelligent race.

But now that would not be necessary. Terra seemed uninhabited. We had seen no cities as we circumnavigated the globe. Had intelligent life-forms failed as yet to materialize on this verdant world? We assumed that fact, in our joyous eagerness to feel the good earth beneath us.

"Prepare to land!" came the warning from Brunoj.

TO THIS DAY I cannot say what happened. No one knew. For the brief instant in which I remained conscious, I felt as if Terra had burst asunder under the terrific impact.

Nor do I know when I finally struggled upward from oblivion; it may have been hours later, or days. Many among us were dead. I was a hopelessly crushed horror who still lived somehow, miraculously. For many days we remained within our sphere—disposing of the dead, tending to the injured, conserving our strength. I might have been destroyed, but with that frantic will to live which rises within us, I flashed a message to my companions:

"I still live! Place me in the delocalizer! I will still be of use!"

This was done. The delocalizer, reacting on the thalamic region of my brain, intercepted pain currents and allowed me to exist without *physical* feeling. Only my mind, lucid and intensely alive as never before, continued to record the adventure in this world. It was not until later that my brain was completely dissevered from my crushed body

My companions had tested the atmosphere and found no gases that might have been inimical to our organisms. Thus they prepared for the greatest adventure of all—the emergence. The locks were opened. A draft of fragrant, if heavy atmosphere swept through our globe. It was pleasantly invigorating and bright outside—so I was told by their telepathic messages, for I alone remained within.

Telepathically they kept me informed, as they wandered up the narrow valley. The soil was firm and amazingly fertile. Vegetation grew thickly everywhere. They reached the far end of the valley at last, and rocky ramparts towered over them.

Then it was—how can I begin to describe it to you, Exalted Empress? From *their minds*, coming back to me, was a sudden flood of excited, hysterical thought! It seemed filled with intense loathing and fear! Imagine me there, if you can—helpless—and in a frenzy of despair wondering what they could have encountered!

Desperately I extended my potential. I managed to intuit a fierce battle in which they were engaging. And some of my companions were dying! Hordes of fierce denizens from the rocks above were descending upon them. They had taken weapons along, true—but I could sense now by their frantic thought that these war-like creatures of Terra numbered in the hundreds, with hordes of them swarming from beyond!

For a long while the battle raged, then I sensed that my companions were retreating. Oh, I was glad! Glad! At least I would not be left alone. But of the two score who had ventured out, only six returned. As they operated the lock of the ship, and tumbled in, I could see—or rather *perceive*—a long part of the terrain behind them.

Then it was that my mind sickened. *For the creatures of this bright new world were—Termans!* Slightly different from

those we had battled on Diskra, true. These were even more monstrous, over six feet tall, with long shaggy manes and a reddish fuzz covering their four limbs... and O Beneficence, I swear it—*sickening blue eyes!* They walked upright and carried crude weapons, shafts of wood fitted with sharp-edged *stone!*

Not until much later did my returning companions tell me what they had seen through their telescopic lenses. Just beyond this valley were vast plains where the Termans seemed to number in the thousands, huge nomadic tribes of them. There were other creatures as well, some massive beyond all belief, others fierce and blood-lusting with huge saber-like teeth.

"We could colonize Terra indeed," was the consensus of our thoughts, "but at what a price! To be forever battling these creatures—particularly the Termans, that abominable *genus Homo...*"

Can you imagine, O Empress Uldulla, how the irony of it hit us? It was almost more than we could bear to think that on Diskra our own *genus Formicae* was in life-or-death struggle with these creatures and we had found them swarming here as well! All—all of this lush, verdant world was defiled!

There was nothing we remaining seven could do now. Sadly we set about repairing the ship, so that we could bear the awful tidings back to Diskra. And as we sped again toward our beloved planet, a sombre pall fell upon us. The interchange of thoughts were brief and tinged with a profound despair.

THIS RESOLVED into amazement, however, as we came ever closer to Diskra. For now, through our telecto-scope we could see that our planet had been subtly altered! A few symmetrical lines had appeared on the face of Diskra, as if a cosmic hand had drawn straight lines across with mathematical precision!

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Not until we had safely landed, did we learn the truth. O joyous news! The hordes of Termans had been repulsed and were even then being slowly driven back! Our scientists had created in the laboratories a type of *formic acid* somewhat similar to the vesicatory secretion occurring within our own bodies—but infinitely more deadly! It had been used as a weapon against the Termans. And more! Huge walls of gaseous formic acid, held unwavering by electronic force fields, were being erected. It was these walls that caused the astronomical illusion we had seen from space.

The rest, O Illustrious Empress, I believe you know well. How the Termans never again were able to penetrate our walls. How we waged war on the detestable creatures for a number of years until finally no trace of them remained on Diskra.

Aye! Five milleniums have passed since the events I have related. Five milleniums since my crushed body was done away with and I was preserved in my rectangle of *glassaram*, with the constantly renovated thought-life-fluid kept exquisitely warm. In this state I have accompanied many another expedition to the planets, in my capacity of official Recorder. I am but Yours to command, Exalted Empress, should you wish to hear of them.

But I have a warning! Slowly I have developed a new sense that needs not eyes, nor ears, nor sense of touch—no antennae even, such as I once possessed—but unites and transcends all these! And I beg of you in my most abject humility, *do not venture to remove even one formic-acid wall*, either from above or from its depth into the ground. Rather build more! Perceptively I shudder in the awful remembrance of their occasion, and the day may come when they will be needed once more.

Thus I warn humbly, and remain Your Supreme Fertility's most insignificant servant,

Braanol.

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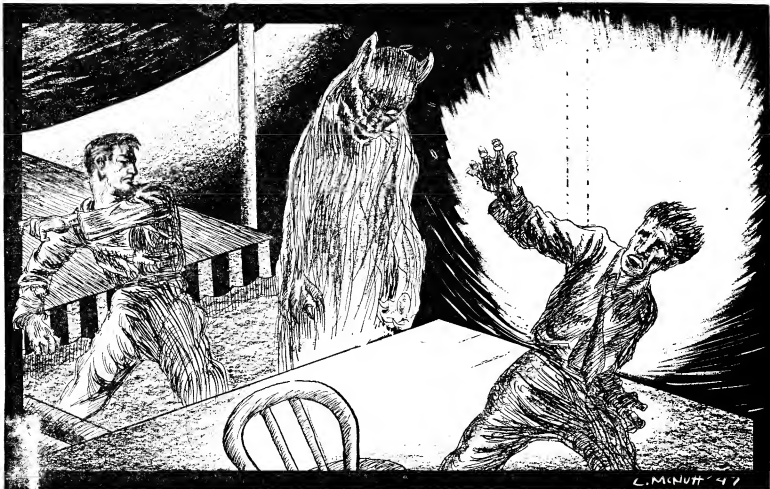
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THE CATAAAA

BY A. E. VAN VOGT

When an alien arrives on an inhabited planet, there is usually only one way that he can pass among the intelligent beings on that planet without being recognized...

THE USUAL GROUP was gathering in the bar. Cathy was already pretending she was far gone. Ted was busy putting on his stupid look. Myra giggled three times the way a musician tunes his instrument for the evening. Jones was talking to Gord in his positive fashion. Gord said "Glub!" every few seconds, just as if he was listening. And Morton tried to draw attention to himself by remaining aloof and intellectual looking far down in his chair.

No one noticed the slight, slim man sitting on a stool before the bar. The man kept glancing at the group; but just when he joined them, or who invited him, no one had any clear idea. Nor did it occur to anyone to tell him to go away.

The stranger said, "You were talking about the basic characteristics of human nature —"

Myra giggled, "Is that what we were talking about? 'I wondered.'"

The laughter that followed did not deter the newcomer. "It so happens that I have had an experience which illustrates the point. It began one day when I was glancing through the newspaper, and I ran across a circus advertisement . . ."

At the top of the ad (he went on) was a large question mark followed by some equally large exclamation marks. Then:

WHAT IS IT?

IT'S THE CAT

COME AND SEE THE CAT

THE CAT WILL STARTLE YOU

THE CAT WILL AMAZE YOU

SEE THE CAT AT THE CIRCUS FREAK SHOW

In smaller letters at the bottom of the ad was the information that the cat was being "shown under the personal direction of Silkey Travis."

Until that point I had been reading with a vague interest and curiosity. The name made me jump.

"Good lord!" I thought. "It's him. It's Silkey Travis on that card."

I hurried to my desk, and took out a card that had come in the mail two days before. At the time it had made no sense

to me at all. The words written on the back in a fine script seemed pure gibberish, and the photograph on the front, though familiar, unlocked no real memory. It was of a man with a haunted look on his face, sitting in a small cage. I now recognized it as being a likeness of Silkey Travis, not as I had known him fifteen or so years before, but plumper, older, as he would be now.

I returned to my chair, and sat musing about the past.

Even in those days, his name had fitted Silkey Travis. At high school he organized the bathing beauty contest, and gave the first prize to his cousin and the second prize to the girl who was the teacher's pet of the most teachers. The students' science exhibition, a collection of local lizards, snakes, insects and a few Indian artifacts was an annual affair, which brought a turnout of admiring parents. Invariably, it was Silkey who organized it. Plays, holiday shows and other paraphernalia of school pastimes felt the weight of his guiding hand and circus spirit.

After graduating from high school, I went on to State college to major in biology, and I lost sight of Silkey for seven years. Then I saw an item in one of the papers to the effect that local boy Silkey Travis was doing well in the big town, having just purchased a "piece" of a vaudeville show, and that he also owned a "piece" in a beach concession in New Jersey.

Again, there was silence. And now, here he was, no doubt "piece" owner of the circus freak show.

Having solved the mystery of the postcard, so it seemed to me, I felt amused and tolerant. I wondered if Silkey had sent the card to all his former school companions. I decided not to puzzle any more about the meaning of the words written on the back. The scheme behind them was all too obvious.

Sitting there, I had absolutely no intention of going to the circus. I went to bed at my usual hour, and woke up with a start some hours later to realize that I was not alone. The sensations that came to me as I lay there have been described by Johnson in his book on morbid fears.

I lived in a quiet neighborhood, and the silence was intense. Presently, I could hear the labored pounding of my heart. Poisons surged into my stomach; gas formed and leaked up to my mouth bringing a bitter taste. I had to fight to keep my breath steady.

And still I could see nothing. The dark fears ran their courses, and the first thought came that I must have had a nightmare. I began to feel ashamed of myself. I mumbled: "Who's there?"

No answer.

I climbed out of bed, and turned on the light. The room was empty. But still I wasn't satisfied. I went out into the hall, then I examined the clothes closet and bathroom. Finally, dissatisfied, I tested the window fastenings—and it was there I received my shock. Painted on the outer side of the pane of one of the windows were the letters:

"The cat requests that you come to the circus."

I went back to bed so furious that I thought of having Silkey arrested. When I woke up in the morning the sign was gone from the window.

By the time breakfast was over, my temper of the night had cooled. I was even able to feel a pitying amusement at the desperate desire of Silkey to let his old acquaintances know what a big shot he was. Before starting off to my morning classes at State, I looked under my bedroom window. I found what looked like footprints, but they were not human, so I decided that Silkey must have taken care to leave no tracks of his own.

At class, just before noon, one of the students asked me whether there was any good explanation in biological science for freaks. I gave the usual explanation of variabilities, nutri-

tional deficiencies, diseases, frustration of brain development affecting the shape of the body, and so on. I finished dryly that for further information I would direct him to my old friend, Silkey Travis, director of freaks at the Pagley-Matterson circus.

The offhand remark caused a sensation. I was informed that a freak at the circus had prompted the original question. "A strange, cat-like creature," the student said in a hushed voice, "that examines you with the same interest that you examine it."

The bell rang at that moment, and I was spared the necessity of making a comment. I remember thinking, however, that people hadn't changed much. They were still primarily interested in eccentricity whereas, as a scientist, the processes of normalcy seemed to me far more fascinating.

I still had no intention of going to the circus. But on the way home that afternoon I put my hand in my breast pocket, and drew out the postcard with the photograph of Silkey on the front. I turned it over absently, and read again the message that was on it:

"The interspatial problem of delivering mail involves enormous energy problems, which effect time differentials. Accordingly, it is possible that this card will arrive before I know who you are. As a precaution I am sending another one to the circus with your name and address on it, and the two cards will go out together.

"Do not worry too much about the method of delivery. I simply put an instrument into a mail box. This precipitates the cards into the box on earth, and they will then be picked up and delivered in the usual fashion. The precipitator then dissolves.

"The photograph speaks for itself."

It didn't. Which is what began to irritate me again. I jammed the card back into my pocket, half-minded to phone up Silkey and ask him what the silly thing meant, if anything. I refrained, of course. It wasn't important enough.

When I got out of bed the next morning, the words, "The cat wants to talk to you!" were scrawled on the outside of the same window pane. They must have been there a long time. Because, even as I stared at them, they began to fade. By the time I finished breakfast they were gone.

I was disturbed now rather than angry. Such persistence on Silkey's part indicated neurotic overtones in his character. It was possible that I ought to go to his show, and so give him the petty victory that would lay his ghost, which had now haunted me two nights running. However, it was not till after lunch that a thought occurred to me that suddenly clinched my intention. I remembered Virginia.

For two years I had been professor of biology at State. It was an early ambition which, now that I had realized it, left me at a loose end for the first time in my life. Accordingly, for the first time in my rather drab existence the mating urge was upon me. Virginia was the girl, and, unfortunately, she regarded me as a cross between a fossil and a precision brain. I felt sure that the idea of marrying me had not yet occurred to her.

For some time it had seemed to me that if I could only convince her, without loss of dignity, that I was a romantic fellow she might be fooled into saying yes. What better method than to pretend that I still got excited over circuses, and, as a grand climax to the evening I would take her in to see Silkey Travis, and hope that my acquaintance with such a character would thrill her exotic soul.

The first hurdle was bridged when I called her up, and she agreed to go to the circus with me. I put the best possible face on for the preliminaries, riding the ferris wheel and such juvenilia. But the moment of the evening for me came when

I suggested that we go and see the freaks being shown by my old friend, Silkey Travis.

It really went over. Virginia stopped and looked at me almost accusingly.

"Philip," she said, "you're not trying to pretend that you know a person called Silkey? She drew a deep breath. "That I have to see."

Silkey came through beautifully. He was not in when we entered, but the ticket taker called into some rear compartment. And a minute later Silkey came charging into the main freak tent. He was plump with the plumpness of a well fed shark. His eyes were narrowed as if he had spent the past fifteen years calculating the best methods of using other people for his own advantage. He had none of the haunted look of the photograph, but there were ghosts in his face. Ghosts of greed and easy vices, ghosts of sharp dealing and ruthlessness. He was all that I had hoped for, and, best of all, he was pathetically glad to see me. His joy had the special quality of the lonely nomad who is at last looking longingly at the settled side of life. We both overdid the greeting a little, but we were about equally pleased at each other's enthusiasm. The hellos and introductions over, Silkey grew condescending.

"Brick was in a while ago. Said you were teaching at State. Congrats. Always knew you had it in you."

I passed over that as quickly as possible. "How about showing us around, Silkey, and telling us about yourself?"

We had already seen the fat woman and the human skeleton, but Silkey took us back and told us *his* life history with them. How he had found them, and helped them to their present fame. He was a little verbose, so on occasion I had to hurry him along. But finally we came to a small tent within the tent, over the closed canvas entrance of which was painted simply, "THE CAT". I had noticed it before, and the chatter of the Barker who stood in front of it had already roused my curiosity:

"The cat . . . come in and see the cat. Folks, this is no ordinary event, but the thrill of a lifetime. Never before has such an animal as this been seen in a circus. A biological phenomenon that has amazed scientists all over the country . . . Folks, this is special. Tickets are twenty-five cents, but if you're not satisfied you can get your money back. That's right. That's what I said. You can get your money back merely by stepping up and asking for it . . ."

And so on. However, his ballyhoo was not the most enticing angle. What began to titillate my nerves was the reaction of the people who went inside. They were allowed to enter in groups, and there must have been a guide inside, because his barely audible voice would mumble on for some minutes, and then it would rise to a hearable level, as he said, "And now, folks, I will draw aside the curtain and show you—the cat!"

The curtain must have been pulled with a single jerk, on a carefully timed basis. For the word, cat, was scarcely out of his mouth, when the audience reaction would sound:

"Aaaaaa!"

Distinct, unmistakable exhalation of the breaths of a dozen startled people. There would follow an uncomfortable silence. Then, slowly, the people would emerge and hurry to the outer exit. Not one, that I was aware of, asked for his money back.

There was a little embarrassment at the gate. Silkey started to mumble something about only owning part of the show, so he couldn't give passes. But I ended that by quickly purchasing the necessary tickets, and we went inside with the next group.

THE ANIMAL that sat in an armchair on the dais was about five feet long and quite slender. It had a cat's head and vestiges of fur. It looked like an exaggerated version of the walkey-talkey animals in comic books.

At that point resemblance to normalcy ended.

It was alien. It was not a cat at all. I recognized that instantly. The structure was all wrong. It took me a moment to identify the radical variations.

The head! High foreheaded it was, and not low and receding. The face was smooth and almost hairless. It had character and strength, and intelligence. The body was well balanced on long, straight legs. The arms were smooth, ending in short but unmistakable fingers, armoured by thin, sharp claws.

But it was the eyes that were really different. They looked normal enough, slightly slanted, properly lidDED, about the same size as the eyes of human beings. *But they danced.* They shifted twice, even three times as swiftly as human eyes. Their balanced movement at such a high speed indicated vision that could read photographically reduced print across a room. What sharp, what incredibly sharp images that brain must see.

All this I saw within the space of a few seconds. Then the creature moved.

It stood up, not hurriedly, but casually, easily, and yawned and stretched. Finally, it took a step forward. Brief panic ensued among the women in the audience, that ended as the guide said quietly:

"It's all right, folks. He frequently comes down and looks us over. He's harmless."

The crowd stood its ground, as the cat came down the steps from the dais and approached me. The animal paused in front of me, and peered at me curiously. Then it reached gingerly forward, opened my coat, and examined the inside breast pocket.

It came up holding the postcard with the picture of Silkey on it. I had brought it along, intending to ask Silkey about it.

For a long moment the cat examined the card, and then it held it out to Silkey. Silkey looked at me.

"Okay?" he said.

I nodded. I had a feeling that I was witnessing a drama the motivations of which I did not understand. I realized that I was watching Silkey intently.

He looked at the picture on the card, and then started to hand it to me. Then he stopped. Jerkily, he pulled the card back, and stared at the photograph.

"For cripes sake," he gasped. "It's a picture of me."

There was no doubt about his surprise. It was so genuine that it startled me. I said:

"Didn't you send that to me? Didn't you write what's on the back there?"

Silkey did not answer immediately. He turned the card over and glared down at the writing. He began to shake his head.

"Doesn't make sense," he muttered. "Hmmm, it was mailed in Marstown. That's where we were three days last week."

He handed it back to me. "Never saw it before in my life. Funny."

His denial was convincing. I held the card in my hand, and looked questioningly at the cat. But it had already lost interest. As we stood there, watching, it turned and climbed back up to the dais, and slumped into a chair. It yawned. It closed its eyes.

And that's all that happened. We all left the tent, and Virginia and I said goodbye to Silkey. Later, on our way home, the episode seemed even more meaningless than when it had happened.

I don't know how long I had been asleep before I awakened. I turned over intending to go right back to sleep. And then I saw that my bedside light was burning. I sat up with a start.

The cat was sitting in a chair beside the bed, not more than three feet away.

There was silence. I couldn't have spoken at the beginning. Slowly, I sat up. Memory came of what the guide at the show

had said. "Harmless!" But I didn't believe that anymore.

Three times now this beast had come here, twice to leave messages. I let my mind run over those messages, and I quailed. "...The cat wants to talk to you!" Was it possible that this thing could talk.

The very inactivity of the animal finally gave me courage. I licked my lips and said:

"Can you talk?"

The cat stirred. It raised an arm in the unhurried fashion of somebody who does not want to cause alarm. It pointed at the night table beside my bed. I followed the pointing finger and saw that an instrument was standing under the lamp. The instrument spoke at me:

"I cannot emit human sounds with my own body, but as you can hear this is an excellent intermediary."

I have to confess that I jumped, that my mind scurried into a deep corner of my head—and only slowly came out again as the silence continued, and no attempt was made to harm me. I don't know why I should have assumed that its ability to speak through a mechanical device was a threat to me. But I had.

I suppose it was really a mental shrinking, my mind unwilling to accept the reality that was here. Before I could think clearly, the instrument on the table said:

"The problem of conveying thoughts through an electronic device depends on rhythmic utilization of brain energies."

The statement stirred me. I had read considerable on that subject, beginning with Professor Hans Berger's report on brain rhythms in 1929. The cat's statements didn't quite fit.

"Isn't the energy potential too small?" I asked. "And besides you have your eyes open. The rhythms are always interfered with when the eyes are open, and in fact such a large part of the cortex yields to the visual centers that no rhythm whatever is detectable at such times."

It didn't strike me then, but I think now that I actually distracted the animal from its purpose. "What measurements have been taken?" it asked. Even through the mind radio, it sounded interested.

"Photoelectric cells," I said, "have measured as much (or as little, which is really more accurate) as 50 microvolts of energy, mostly in the active regions of the brain. Do you know what a microvolt is?"

The creature nodded. It said after a moment, "I won't tell you what energy my brain develops. It would probably frighten you, but it isn't all intelligence. I am a student on a tour of the galaxy, what might be called a post-graduate tour. Now, we have certain rules—" It stopped. "You opened your mouth. Did you wish to say something?"

I felt dumb, overwhelmed. Then, weakly, "You said galaxy."

"That is correct."

"B-but wouldn't that take years?" My brain was reaching out, striving to grasp, to understand.

"My tour will last about a thousand of your years," said the cat.

"You're immortal?"

"Oh, no."

"But—"

There I stopped. I couldn't go on. I sat there, blank-brained, while the creature went on:

"The rules of the fraternity of students require that we tell one person about ourselves before we leave the planet. And that we take with us a symbolical souvenir of the civilization of the beings on it. I'm curious to know what you would suggest as a souvenir of earth. It can be anything, so long as it tells at a glance the dominating character of the race."

The question calmed me. My brain stopped its alternation of mad whirling followed by blankness. I began to feel

distinctly better. I shifted myself into a more comfortable position and stroked my jaw thoughtfully. I sincerely hoped that I was giving the impression that I was an intelligent person whose opinion would be worthwhile.

A sense of incredible complication began to seize on me. I had realized it before, but now, with an actual decision to make, it seemed to me that human beings were really immensely intricate creatures. How could anybody pick one facet of their nature, and say, "This is man!" Or "This represents man!" I said slowly:

"A work of art, science, or any useful article—you include those?"

"Anything."

My interest was now at its peak. My whole being accepted the wonderfulness of what had happened. It seemed tremendously important that the great race that could travel the breadth and length of the galaxy should have some true representation of man's civilization. It amazed me, when I finally thought of the answer, that it had taken me so long. But the moment it occurred to me, I knew I had it.

"Man," I said, "is primarily a religious animal. From times too remote to be a written record, he has needed a faith in something. Once, he believed almost entirely in animate gods like rivers, storms, plants, then his gods became invisible; now they are once more becoming animate. An economic system, science—whatever it will be, the dominating article of it will be that he worships it without regard to reason, in other words in a purely religious fashion."

I finished with a quiet satisfaction, "All you need is an image of a man in a durable metal, his head tilted back, his arms raised to the sky, a rapt expression on his face, and written on the base of the inscription, 'I believe'."

I saw that the creature was staring at me. "Very interesting," it said at last. "I think you are very close to it, but you haven't quite got the answer."

It stood up. "But now I want you to come with me."

"Eh?"

"Dress, please."

It was unemotionally said. The fear that had been held deep inside me for minutes came back like a fire that had reached a new cycle of energy.

I DROVE MY CAR. The cat sat beside me. The night was cool and refreshing, but dark. A fraction of a moon peered out occasionally from scurrying clouds, and there were glimpses of star filtered dark blue sky. The realization that, from somewhere up there, this creature had come down to our earth dimmed my tenseness. I ventured:

"Your people—have they progressed much further than we to the innermost meaning of truth?"

It sounded drab and precise, a pedagogical rather than a vitally alive question. I added quickly:

"I hope you won't mind answering a few questions."

Again it sounded inadequate. It seemed to me in an abrupt agony of despair that I was muffing the opportunity of the centuries. Silently, I cursed my professional training that made my every word sound as dry as dust.

"That card," I said. "You sent that?"

"Yes." The machine on the cat's lap spoke quietly but clearly:

"How did you know my address and my name?"

"I didn't."

Before I could say anything, the cat went on, "You will understand all that before the night's over."

"Oh!" The words held me for a second. I could feel the tightness crawling into my stomach. I had been trying not to think of what was going to happen before this night was over. "... Questions?" I croaked. "Will you answer them?"

I parted my lips to start a machine gun patter of queries. And then, I closed them again. *What did I want to know?* The vast implications of that reply throttled my voice. Why, oh, why, are human beings so emotional at the great moments of their lives? I couldn't think, for what seemed an endless time. And when I finally spoke again, my first question was trite and not at all what I intended. I said:

"You came in a spaceship?"

The cat looked at me thoughtfully. "No," it replied slowly. "I use the energy in my brain."

"Eh! You came through space in your own body?"

"In a sense. One of these years human beings will make the initial discoveries about the rhythmic use of energy. It will be a dazzling moment for science."

"We have," I said, "already made certain discoveries about our nervous systems and rhythm."

"The end of that road," was the answer, "is control of the powers of nature. I will say no more about that."

I was silent, but only briefly. The questions were bubbling now. "Is it possible," I asked, "to develop an atomic powered spaceship?"

"Not in the way you think," said the cat. "An atomic explosion cannot be confined except when it is drawn out in a series of timed frustrations. And that is an engineering problem, and has very little to do with creative physics."

"Life," I mumbled, "where did life come from?"

"Electronic accidents occurring in a suitable environment," I had to stop there. I couldn't help it. "Electronic accidents. What do you mean?"

"The difference between an inorganic and an organic atom is the arrangement of the internal structure. The hydrocarbon compounds being the most easily affected under certain conditions are the most common form of life. But now that you have atomic energy you will discover that life can be created from any element or compound of elements. Be careful. The hydrocarbon is a weak life structure that could be easily overwhelmed in its present state of development."

I felt a chill. I could just picture the research that would be going on in government laboratories.

"You mean," I gulped, "there are life forms that would be dangerous the moment they are created?"

"Dangerous to man," said the cat. It pointed suddenly. "Turn up that street, and then through a side entrance into the circus grounds."

I had been wondering tensely where we were going. Strange-ly, it was a shock to realize the truth.

A few minutes later we entered the dark, silent tent of the freaks. And I knew that the final drama of the cat on earth was about to be enacted.

A tiny light flickered in the shadows. It came nearer, and I saw that there was a man walking underneath it. It was too dark to recognize him, but the light grew stronger, and I saw that it had no source. And suddenly I recognized Silkey Travis.

He was sound asleep.

He came forward, and stood in front of the cat. He looked unnatural, forlorn, like a woman caught without her makeup on. One long, trembling look I took at him, and then I stammered:

"What are you going to do?"

The machine the cat carried did not reply immediately. The cat turned and stared at me thoughtfully, then it touched Silkey's face, gently, with one finger. Silkey's eyes opened, but he made no other reaction. I realized that one part of his consciousness had been made aware of what was happening. I whispered:

"Can he hear?"

The cat nodded.

"Can he think?"

The cat shook its head; and then it said:

"In your analysis of the basic nature of human beings, you selected a symptom only. Man is religious because of a certain characteristic. I'll give you a clue. When an alien arrives on an inhabited planet, there is usually only one way that he can pass among the intelligent beings on that planet without being recognized for what he is. When you find that method, you have attained understanding of the fundamental character of the race."

It was hard for me to think. In the dim emptiness of the freak tent, the great silence of the circus grounds all around, what was happening seemed unnatural. I was not afraid of the cat. But there was a fear inside me, as strong as terror, as dark as night. I looked at the unmoving Silkey with all the lines of his years flabby on his face. And then I stared at the light that hovered above him. And finally I looked at the cat, and I said:

"Curiosity. You mean, man's curiosity. His interest in strange objects makes him accept them as natural when he sees them."

The cat said, "It seems incredible that you, an intelligent man, have never realized the one character of all human beings." It turned briskly, straightening. "But now, enough of this conversation. I have fulfilled the basic requirements of my domicile here. I have lived for a period without being suspected, and I have told one inhabitant that I have been here. It remains for me to send home a significant artifact of your civilization—and then I can be on my way. . . elsewhere."

I ventured, shakily, "Surely, the artifact isn't Silkey?"

"We seldom," said the cat, "choose actual inhabitants of a planet, but when we do we give them a compensation designed to balance what we take away. In his case, virtual immortality."

I felt desperate, suddenly. Seconds only remained; and it wasn't that I had any emotion for Silkey. He stood there like a clod, and even though later he would remember, it didn't matter. It seemed to me that the cat had discovered some innate secret of human nature which I, as a biologist, must know.

"For God's sake," I said, "you haven't explained anything yet. What is this basic human characteristic. And what about the postcard you sent me. And—"

"You have all the clues." The creature started to turn away. "Your inability to comprehend is no concern of mine. We have a code, we students, that is all."

"But what," I asked desperately, "shall I tell the world? Have you no message for human kind, something—"

The cat was looking at me again. "If you can possibly restrain yourself," it said, "don't tell anyone anything."

This time, when it moved away, it did not look back. I saw, with a start, that the mist of light above Silkey's head was expanding, growing. Brighter, vaster, it grew. It began to pulse with a gentle but unbroken rhythm. Inside its coalescing fire the cat and Silkey were dim forms, like shadows in a fire.

Abruptly, the shadows faded; and then the mist of light began to dim. Slowly, it sagged to the ground, and lay for minutes blurring into the darkness.

Of Silkey and the creature there was no sign.

* * * *

The group sitting around the table in the bar was briefly silent. Finally, Gord said, "Glub!" and Jones said in a positive fashion:

"You solved the problem of the postcard, of course?"

The slim, professorish man nodded. "I think so. The reference in the card to time differentials is the clue. The card was sent *after* Silkey was put on exhibition in the school museum of the cat people, but because of time variations in transmission it arrived *before* I knew Silkey would be in town."

Morton came up out of the depths of his chair. "And what

about this basic human characteristic, of which religion is merely an outward expression?"

The stranger made a gesture. "Silkey, exhibiting freaks, was really exhibiting himself. Religion is self-dramatization before a god. Self-love, narcissism—in our own little way we show ourselves off. . . and so a strange being could come into our midst unsuspected."

Cathy hiccupped, and said, "The love interest is what I like. Did you marry Virginia? You are the professor of biology at State, aren't you?"

The other shook his head. "I was," he said. "I should have followed the cat's advice. But I felt it was important to tell other people what had happened. I was dismissed after three months, and I won't tell you what I'm doing now. But I must

go on. The world must know about the weakness that makes us so vulnerable. Virginia? She married a pilot with one of the big air firms. She fell for his line of self-dramatization."

He stood up. "Well, I guess I'll be on my way. I've got a lot of bars to visit tonight."

When he had gone, Ted paused momentarily in his evening's task of looking stupid. "There," he said, "is a guy who really has a line. Just imagine. He's going to tell that story about five times tonight. What a set-up for a fellow who wants to be the center of attention."

Myra giggled. Jones began to talk to Gord in his know-it-all fashion. Gord said, "Glub!" every few seconds, just as if he was listening. Cathy put her head on the table and snored drunkenly. And Morton sagged lower and lower into his chair.



BOOKS IN THE FANTASY WORLD

On the back cover of this issue of *FANTASY BOOK* you will find an advertisement regarding forthcoming fantasy and science-fiction books from FPCL. Work is now in progress on the first two of these books to be released in January—these are Stanton A. Coblenz' intriguing 80,000 word novel of the lost continent of Atlantis, *THE SUNKEN WORLD*, and *OUT OF THE UNKNOWN* by A. E. van Vogt and E. Mayne Hull. (A superb collection of stories from the magazine *UNKNOW*). Also *PEOPLE OF THE COMET*, Austin Hall's great *Weird Tales* fantasy is expected to be ready about that time . . .

Those of you who desire to obtain these books will find it advantageous to place your pre-publication order *now*. Not only will pre-publication orders guarantee you special benefits (such as autographed copies—when available—, etc.) but will enable the publisher to better determine the number of copies of each book to be published, as well as expediting the process of actual publication. The eight titles listed on the back cover are ALL scheduled for publication in the first half of 1948. FPCL will maintain that schedule to the best of its ability, but your order *now* may insure additional titles being published during this period. Also, production units will be limited—which is one more reason for sending in that advance order! Original editions are infinitely more valuable to a collector than succeeding ones.

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THE PRIME PRESS (see ad page 25) have already released *THE MISLAID CHARM* by Alexander M. Phillips. Also Geo. O. Smith's *VENUS EQUILATERAL*. And the *HADLEY PUBLISHING CO.* (see inside front cover) announces *THE MIGHTIEST MACHINE* by John W. Campbell, Jr. is now in print, and that the *second* edition of Edward Elmer Smith's *SKYLARK OF SPACE* will be ready in Nov. *THE FANTASY PRESS* now has four books in print. *SPACE-HOUNDS OF IPC* by Edward E. Smith, *THE LEGION OF SPACE* by Jack Williamson, *THE FORBIDDEN GARDEN* by John Taine, and *OF WORLDS BEYOND*, (a symposium of Science Fiction Writing) edited by L. A. Eshbach.

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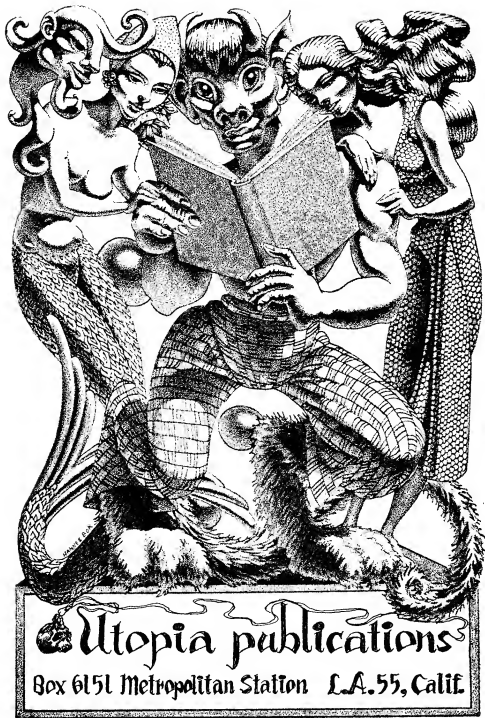
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